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ABSTRACT

The report evaluates a special initiative of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department of Education of Northern Ireland (DENI) in 1996-1997 and 1998-1999 to encourage institutions to develop high quality provisions for students with disabilities and to increase the participation in higher education of students with all types of disability. This initiative, the Students with Learning Disabilities and Difficulties (SLDD), encouraged the dissemination of good practice and built on previous special initiatives. Of the 85 bids received from institutions, 31 were selected for funding. Available data, from a variety of sources, suggest that most of the projects have met the majority of their objectives, with some being particularly successful, and a few experiencing difficulties. Two projects have run the risk of providing poor value for money, and some other projects started late, largely because of staff recruitment problems. There is less evidence of program impact outside the immediate environment of student service providers, although the opinion of those involved is that the initiative is also making an impact in these areas, such as academic departments. The adoption of project outcomes to enhance provisions for students with disabilities has been assisted by external pressure on institutions caused by changes in legal and regulatory frameworks. No accurate data exist to determine the extent to which the enrollment of students with disabilities is correlated with particular project outcomes or with the institutions hosting the projects. A number of issues for the future are outlined. Appendixes contain a list of SLDD projects, a discussion of international initiatives focused on students with disabilities, and a discussion of the National Disability Team. (Contains 21 references.) (SLD)

October 00/46

Report

Evaluation of the 1996-99 HEFCE/DENI disability special initiative

**A report by The Higher Education
Consultancy Group (THECG) and the
Commonwealth Higher Education
Management Service (CHEMS)**

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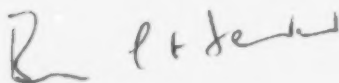
Foreword

The Council aims to encourage institutions to increase access, secure equal opportunities, and maximise achievement for all who can benefit from higher education. This involves taking into consideration the different learning and support needs of a diverse range of students, including students with disabilities.

Between 1996-97 and 1998-99, the HEFCE and DENI funded more than 30 projects which aimed to develop high-quality provision for students with disabilities, and to increase the participation in HE of students with all types of disability. Towards the end of the three-year period, we commissioned this evaluation to consider how far the initiative had met its aims. This report describes the impressive work which has taken place in the HE sector, and outlines some important lessons for the future.

We have been able to feed the findings into the new initiative to improve provision for disabled students, which was announced in early 1999. Nearly 50 three-year projects started at the beginning of 2000, supported by the National Disability Team (based at Coventry University). We wish them well in their work.

This evaluation will be valuable to those working with students with disabilities. We hope it will also be of interest to all those working in higher education, who will need to take account of the needs of an increasingly diverse range of students. We will consider carefully how to take forward the recommendations of this report, to ensure that we are doing as much as we can to enable institutions to support all students in their learning experience.



Sir Brian Fender
Chief Executive, HEFCE

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Evaluation of the 1996-99 HEFCE/DENI disability special initiative

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions
Of interest to those responsible for	Widening participation, learning and teaching, academic and strategic planning
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1 Executive Summary

1.1 This report evaluates the HEFCE/DENI 1996-97 to 1998-99 special initiative to 'encourage institutions to develop high quality provision for students with disabilities, and to increase the participation in higher education of students with all types of disability' – the SLDD initiative. Its specific objectives were to: encourage wide dissemination of good practice; build on the momentum of the previous special initiatives; and encourage collaborative ventures. The SLDD initiative provided £6 million in funding over the three years, and from the 85 institutional bids received following the issue of HEFCE Circular 9/96 in July 1996, 31 were selected for funding by HEFCE on the recommendation of the SLDD Advisory Group, and a further one by DENI.

1.2 The SLDD initiative was supported by a small HEFCE secretariat based in Bristol, and by a geographically dispersed national co-ordination and development team – eQuip – which had an administrative centre at Coventry University. A preliminary report was produced for the Council in September 1999 on the operation of this co-ordination and development function in order to assist HEFCE with the retendering arrangements for the new 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative.

The Effectiveness of the SLDD Initiative

1.3 The report was produced by the Higher Education Consultancy Group (THECG) and the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS). It evaluates the effectiveness of the SLDD initiative in two main ways: an assessment of the extent to which projects have met their objectives, and (insofar as it is possible to judge) the impact of the initiative as a whole on the higher education sector. Available data suggest that most projects have met the majority of their

objectives, with some being particularly successful, and a small number of others having difficulties. Overall we are impressed by the claimed impact of many projects, and the changes to the way that disability issues are now treated in some institutions hosting projects. An important issue here is related to the fact that a number of the projects were based on enhancing practice, and located within student services settings where relatively small sums of additional resource could serve as a very significant stimulus to activity. Such a location for projects makes implementation and sustainability much simpler than is often the case, as it is closely related to the direct professional responsibilities of student services staff.

1.4 There is less evidence of impact outside the immediate environment operated by student service providers (for example, in academic departments), although, in general, the overall opinion of those involved is that the initiative has been making a significant impact on the sector. However, not all higher education institutions have received – or sought – funding, and many institutions are likely to have been largely unaffected by the SLDD initiative, except for the very real benefits of networking and information sharing for those professionally involved in working with students with disabilities. Visits to a sample of projects broadly confirm this view: a great deal of dedicated professional activity taking place within specific areas, whilst much still needs to be done to encourage appropriate change in both behaviour and operations within institutions as a whole.

1.5 The adoption of project outcomes to enhance provision for students with disabilities has been assisted by external pressure on institutions caused by changes in legal and regulatory frameworks including:

- The removal of the means test in relation to the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) and the extension of eligibility for the DSA to part-time and postgraduate students, thus reducing previous financial barriers to study for many students.
- The introduction of additional funding for institutions recruiting students with disabilities

as part of HEFCE's widening participation initiative.

- Institutional implementation of the recommendations of the recent base-line survey on good practice in disability provision (HEFCE 99/04), and the adoption of the QAA code of practice for students with disabilities.
- The recent recommendation of the Disability Rights Task Force that all education providers should be subject to new legislation providing equal access for students with disabilities.

These measures will have a major impact on most institutions, and the SLDD initiative has been valuable in developing good practice to support such changes.

1.6 Notwithstanding the general success of the SLDD initiative, a small number of problems have limited the effectiveness of some projects and raised operational issues for the Council to consider: two projects have had difficulty in meeting their objectives and run the risk of providing poor value for money; a number of projects started late largely because of difficulties in recruiting staff; support for projects from senior staff within host institutions is reported as being variable (although in some cases good); and, in a small number of cases, whilst the immediate environment in which projects were located was supportive, considerable difficulties were faced in working more broadly within institutions, particularly in some academic departments.

1.7 So far as the assessment of one of the broader aims of the SLDD initiative is concerned, no accurate data exist to assess the extent to which the enrolment of students with disabilities is correlated either with particular project outcomes, or with those institutions hosting projects. For the first time, in the current year the Council is collecting data on students claiming DSAs as a basis for allocating institutional funding, and these data will serve as a proxy measure for the number of students with disabilities within higher education. Although HESA has previously collected data on disability, these were based on self-assessment by students and are not robust (unlike DSA data which are based on an individual assessment). It follows that no

comparable data are available for previous years, and it is therefore impossible to assess statistically any contribution of the SLDD initiative to increasing participation rates in higher education.

Value for Money

1.8 The evaluation reviews value for money and reaches a positive conclusion overall on the benefits and outcomes of the SLDD initiative. For a relatively small investment, considerable gains have accrued. The Council will, however, wish to consider carefully the value for money of any further initiatives following its new programme 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students'. This provides an important dissemination element to inform the sector further, and also to encourage provision in those institutions where little activity currently exists. When that is complete, the case for a further initiative cannot be assumed, and the balance between institutions resourcing disability provision from their own funds and continuing HEFCE special support should be revisited.

The Management and Co-ordination of the SLDD Initiative

1.9 In a survey of project holders we sought to obtain data on the quality of service and support provided to projects both by those HEFCE officers responsible for the SLDD initiative, and by the eEquip team. From those who have had contact with the Council or eEquip we received generally favourable comments, and it is clear that the eEquip team have been effective and energetic in establishing the co-ordination and development function in circumstances that were initially difficult. For example, they were appointed several months after the initiative began. Moreover, a considerable number of changes have recently taken place in the priorities accorded to provision for students with disabilities, and this process of rapid change has exerted additional pressures on all those involved in the management and co-ordination of the initiative.

1.10 The report reviews the management and co-ordination of the SLDD initiative and draws attention to a number of issues, some of which were first identified in the earlier preliminary report. We welcome the fact that many of these have been

acted upon by HEFCE in implementing revised co-ordination arrangements for the new 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative (see Appendix C).

1.11 Two issues are of particular significance: the importance of a co-ordinating team visiting all projects, and the extent to which they should explicitly seek to 'add value' to projects and play a quality assurance role. So far as the former is concerned, with the support of the SLDD Advisory Group, eEquip decided to visit as a priority the more structurally complex projects (such as collaborative projects) as well as visiting projects that were reported to be experiencing difficulties. As such the team did not visit all projects, and instead emphasised supporting projects through distance support, publications, and running events to produce 'horizontal' co-ordination between projects, as well as providing guidance on generic areas such as evaluation, embedding and project management. Although this approach provided valuable support, the report concludes that the decision not to visit all projects was a mistake and that the Advisory Group should not have agreed to it. Visiting projects should therefore be a priority for the new National Disability Team (NDT) for the 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative.

1.12 So far as the second issue is concerned, this evaluation raises a major issue about the extent to which the primary role of a co-ordinating team is to support projects to meet their original objectives, or whether it should seek explicitly to add value to projects including undertaking some quality assurance role. This question applies to other initiatives as well. The 'horizontal' co-ordination between projects encouraged by the eEquip team was appropriate for the former purpose, but we came across a number of projects which, although undertaking good work and effective in their own terms, would have been capable of greater achievements if appropriate external advice and stimulus were regularly available. The provision of such support raises a number of issues about the nature, role and experience of co-ordinating teams, and there is a need for clear articulation of Council policy on this.

Future Issues

1.13 The report identifies a number of operational lessons for the future, some of which have already been adopted by HEFCE where they were raised in the Phase One report. In addition, in Chapter 10 several policy-related issues highlighted by the evaluation are identified for HEFCE to consider.

These include the need for:

- Ensuring a more integrated and 'joined up' strategy between initiatives (for example, disability programmes, the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL), widening participation), in order to avoid the danger of them being seen as separate activities.
- The provision of strong leadership by national bodies in the area of disabilities in order to help institutions meet new legal and regulatory requirements, including providing an information and training strategy to ensure that all institutions and staff are fully aware of their new responsibilities.
- Additional research and commissioned work to provide better management and planning information to guide disability provision.
- Ensuring that institutional funding to support disability provision is actually spent by universities and colleges for the purpose for which it is allocated.

1.14 In some of these areas, and also in relation to the specific issues addressed in the report, HEFCE are already taking action, for example, through the revised co-ordination arrangements for the new NDT team. In addition, it will be important for the new UK-wide Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), to ensure effective integration between disability provision for students and the development of teaching and learning activity, both nationally and institutionally.

1.15 The 1996-99 SLDD initiative has been followed by a further three-year programme 'Improving provision for disabled students', providing £2 million a year (£6 million in total) to support 50 projects. The programme is supported by the National Disability Team, based at Coventry University. Further details are available at <http://www.natdisteam.ac.uk>.

2 Introduction and Terms of Reference

2.1 This report contains an evaluation of the HEFCE/DENI 1996-97 to 1998-99 special initiative on 'Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities' (SLDD). The study was undertaken in two phases spread over a nine-month period in 1999-2000. Phase One reported in September 1999, and was concerned with examining 'the impact, effectiveness and future need for a co-ordination and development function as part of the HEFCE funded disability funding programme'. This was required in advance of the full evaluation in order for the Council to set in train the retendering of the contract to undertake the co-ordination function which expired at the end of March 2000. Phase Two reports on the initiative as a whole, and this report includes a summary of the information provided to the Council at the end of Phase One.

2.2 The study was undertaken by the Higher Education Consultancy Group (THECG) and the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS) working in partnership. The consultants were: Allan Schofield (THECG and Project Director), John Fielden (Director, CHEMS), Svava Bjarnason (Consultant, CHEMS), and Dr Caroline Davies (Disabilities Manager, University of North London).

2.3 The formal terms of reference for the evaluation as set out by HEFCE were for 'the evaluation to provide:

- Evidence on the success of the initiative against its core aims, including key lessons to be learned.
- Evidence on any other impact of the initiative, including key lessons to be learned.
- Evidence on whether the initiative has represented value for money.
- Advice and feedback on the effectiveness of the eEquip team's co-ordination and development activity.
- Advice, support and feedback on the effectiveness of the Council's management of the initiative.
- Advice on areas of future development work, including lessons to be learned.'

The tender documents also identified a number of specific questions to be asked under four headings: the effectiveness of the initiative; lessons for projects; management; and co-ordination and development. It should be noted that this study is not an evaluation of individual projects.

Methodology

2.4 The general methodology used was characterised by two main approaches: first, the need for a rigorous independent evaluation if requirements for public accountability and value for money are to be met. Second, strong emphasis was placed on working openly and collaboratively with all those involved, in order to stress the formative aspects of the evaluation.

2.5 The methodology used to undertake the evaluation involved an extensive set of activities, including:

- A documentary analysis of relevant papers, including SLDD Advisory Group papers, eEquip papers and reports, and two reviews of the initiative by the HEFCE Audit Service (March 1998 and January 1999).
- An analysis of project monitoring reports produced in 1998, 1999 and 2000.
- Interviews with relevant individuals and agencies including HEFCE, SHEFC, Skill, CVCP, DISinHE; and some current and recent past SLDD Advisory Group members. This included a discussion with the National Co-ordination Team for FDTL and TLTP based at the Open University in order to consider issues of mutual interest and collaboration with eEquip. In all, approximately 30 individual discussions were held.
- A joint meeting with the eEquip co-ordinators, plus individual meetings or telephone discussions with all three co-ordinators, and an individual meeting with the eEquip administrator.
- During Phase One an invitation was sent by e-mail to all project holders to respond electronically to six questions solely on co-ordination and development, and 11 responses were received either in writing or verbally (34% response).

- During Phase Two visits were made to ten projects of different kinds to review detailed operational issues and project processes.
- During Phase Two a second questionnaire to all project holders requesting information on a range of issues concerned with the initiative as a whole; 15 responses were received (a 47% response rate, or 69% if written returns and visits are added together).
- A questionnaire was sent to all institutions who submitted an original proposal in 1996 but were unsuccessful, in an attempt to assess the extent to which an absence of SLDD funding had inhibited institutional activity. Eighteen responses were received (a 41% response rate).
- A questionnaire was sent to institutions who had never submitted a proposal under any of the various Council initiatives for students with disabilities, to attempt to examine the broader impact of the SLDD programme. Fourteen replies were received (a 37% response rate).
- Using the existing databases of CHEMS, we have also surveyed relevant initiatives providing support to students with disabilities in three comparable higher education systems: the USA, Canada and Australia.

2.6 These activities slightly exceeded those originally identified by the consultants as necessary to fulfil the terms of reference and subsequently agreed by the Council, and reflect the necessity for exploring additional issues as the evaluation progressed.

2.7 Although extensive consultation took place in both phases, the response of projects to our questionnaires was disappointing, although when visits are taken into account the majority of projects provided evidence to this evaluation. Our study was not alone in this, and at different times both eQuip and HEFCE have found difficulty in receiving comprehensive and timely returns from projects. In practice no single reason appears to exist for this, rather a combination of factors seems to be in evidence: high workloads of project staff; pressure to complete projects; in some cases project staff either moving or having moved to new projects in

other institutions to take up new posts; inexperienced project management; questionnaire and evaluation fatigue; and a low priority placed on completion of the formalised aspects of project funding. Nonetheless, we are confident that the data received from projects, when taken with all the other information sources, provide a more than adequate evidence base for this evaluation.

2.8 One issue that the Council will need to consider carefully was raised by a small number of project holders and concerns the extent to which a few institutional monitoring returns provided a less than complete picture of progress and outcomes, because of what one respondent described as a wish by some senior staff to 'sanitise' returns to HEFCE. Although we would not wish to overstate the extent of this problem (and the HEFCE Audit Service audit was satisfied by those monitoring returns it surveyed), it is a matter of concern that even a small number of project holders can confidentially report that they were not permitted to be frank in their returns, and that pressure was applied which had the potential to compromise their professional standards. Evaluations of this kind – indeed almost all interactions between the Council and institutions – depend on appropriate and accurate information being exchanged, and HEFCE will wish to consider the implications if such action is repeated in other initiatives.

3 An Overview of the SLDD Initiative: Background, Context and Project Selection

3.1 The SLDD initiative was preceded by two one-year programmes (in 1993-94 and 1994-95) to encourage widening participation for students with special needs. HEFCE provided £3 million a year to fund 38 projects in 1993-94 and 48 projects in 1994-95 dealing with sensory impairment, dyslexia, access to information, curriculum and learner support, careers advice, and other areas. To build on effective existing practice, funding was directed to projects in institutions which already had a good record of disability provision. Activities in these initial two years were evaluated in November 1995, and HEFCE has acted on a number of the recommendations made, including the move to a three-year funding cycle.

3.2 In general, support for students with disabilities within universities is provided by a relatively small group of staff, often supported by agencies such as the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (Skill), and the Disability Information Systems in Higher Education (DISinHE) Centre funded by JISC. Such staff are often located within student support services within institutions, rarely occupy senior positions within universities and colleges, and until recently have typically reported that they had very limited opportunities to influence relevant institutional policy and practice (although this may now be changing). Until the last few years relatively few higher education institutions have adopted explicit policies in relation to provision for students with disabilities, and, although this situation is now changing, many SLDD projects report operating in an environment where numerous barriers exist to enhancing disability provision (typically, but not exclusively, a lack of incentives to treat disability issues as a high priority; also, lack of resources – including time, and lack of staff support in some institutions at senior levels). Thus, many projects funded through the SLDD initiative have had to operate in an institutional environment where widespread commitment to projects cannot be assumed.

3.3 However, such an environment is likely to

change rapidly as all higher education institutions address the implications of a number of developments that will require much greater attention to disability issues in future. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Relevant legislation, for example, the introduction of Part Three of the Disability Discrimination Act which will require institutional compliance to meet certain legal requirements from which higher education has previously been exempt, and the recent recommendation of the Disability Rights Task Force that all education providers should be subject to new legislation providing equal access for students with disabilities.
- The removal of the means test in relation to the Disabled Students Allowance and its extension to part-time students, thus reducing previous financial barriers to study for some students.
- The introduction of additional funding for institutions recruiting students with disabilities as part of HEFCE's widening participation initiative.
- Institutional implementation of both the recommendations of the recent base-line survey on good practice in disability provision, and the adoption of the QAA code of practice for students with disabilities.

3.4 Such developments will require institutions (and their representative bodies such as CVCP) to adopt a much more proactive stance to disability provision. In Chapter 10 we consider some of the practical implications of this so far as the future organisation of Council disability initiatives are concerned.

The Objectives of the Initiative

3.5 As announced in HEFCE Circular 9/96 the objectives of the SLDD initiative were:

‘To encourage institutions to develop high quality provision for students with disabilities, and to increase the participation in higher education of students with all types of disability. The specific objectives are to:

- a) Encourage wide dissemination of good practice and expertise throughout the sector and beyond.
- b) Build on the momentum of the previous special initiatives by helping to embed successful approaches and strategies at an institutional level.
- c) Encourage collaborative ventures – particularly between HEIs with significant experience of providing for students with disabilities and those with less experience.'

The extent to which these aims and objectives have been achieved is reviewed in Chapter 4.

3.6 The SLDD initiative was supported by a small HEFCE secretariat based in Bristol, and – during the period covered by this evaluation – by a geographically dispersed national co-ordination and development team (eQuip) which had its administrative base at Coventry University. eQuip consisted of three half-time professional staff equivalent to 1.5 FTE based at three geographically separate locations (Mike Adams at Coventry University, Liz Sutherland at the Open University [Scotland], and Rosemary Turner at Lancaster University). They were supported by a full-time administrator located at Coventry, and three approximately half-time secretarial and clerical staff working at the different locations. The eQuip team's contract ended in April 2000. For the new 1999-2002 disability initiative the Council has appointed a National Disability Team (NDT) to co-ordinate project activity. The NDT is not considered in this report.

3.7 In March 1998, the HEFCE Audit Service reviewed the operation of the SLDD initiative, and carried out its 'standard' monitoring audit, primarily focussing on accountability and associated

issues. Whilst making a number of recommendations on operational issues, the HEFCE Audit Service was generally supportive of the initiative and found 'significant strengths' in aspects of it. In appropriate parts of this evaluation we consider the HEFCE Audit Service's recommendations, and the extent to which they have been implemented.

3.8 The overall policy for the initiative is set by the Board of HEFCE in the light of advice from the EQUALL Committee (which has a broad remit for considering equal opportunities, access and lifelong learning) and the SLDD Advisory Group, and this arrangement is considered in more detail in paragraphs 8.3 – 8.6.

The Projects

3.9 Eighty-five bids were received following the issue of HEFCE Circular 9/96 in July 1996, and 31 were allocated funding by HEFCE on the recommendation of the SLDD Advisory Group, and a further one by DENI. Details concerning these projects are provided in Appendix A. Of the projects funded 19 were located in post-1992 universities and colleges, and 13 in pre-1992 universities. Of these, five were collaborative projects involving a number of institutions but for contractual purposes located in one host provider.

3.10 Table 3.1 identifies the main themes of projects, which varied widely as to whether they concentrated on one issue (for example, dyslexia) or covered a broader range of activities. Most projects included a staff development dimension, both as a means of dissemination and also in order to attempt to share good practice.

Table 3.1: The Main Themes of SLDD Projects

Categorisation of Theme	Numbers of Projects
Access to curriculum and teaching and learning	17
Information technology	17
Staff development	23
Deafness	9
Mental health	10
Dyslexia	14
Other	8

[Source: eQuip]

3.11 Projects varied in terms of size and complexity, and Table 3.2 classifies projects by the amount of funding, with the average over three years being £150,001 - £200,000.

Table 3.2: Project Size by Funding

Size of Project Funding (over three years)	Numbers of Projects
£50,000 - £100,000	5
£100,001 - £150,000	9
£150,001 - £200,000	11
£200,001 - £250,000	3
£250,001 - £300,000	2
Over £300,000	1

[Note: HEFCE funded projects only]

3.12 One large project was approved: a major collaborative initiative involving seven institutions in the South of England. When spread over three years, the annual expenditure on some projects was therefore quite small, typically providing enough to fund a project worker, some part-time support, and modest operational costs. Institutions were not permitted to charge overheads as HEFCE had deemed these already paid through the block grant, and in most cases institutions provided significant matched funding (see paragraph 8.11).

3.13 Only five projects involved collaborative

activities, and the requirement for collaboration which featured in HEFCE Circular 6/96 was not achieved to the extent intended. It may have been that the relative frailty of much institutional provision at that time meant that the circumstances for collaboration did not generally exist at the time of project selection. However, as noted above, collaboration features much more strongly in the new initiative and 13 projects have been selected. Particular issues associated with collaborative projects are considered in Chapter 6. The collaborative projects were:

- UMIST – Access Summit project, four institutions all in Manchester.
- UWE – WEBB accessibility project, three institutions: UWE, Bath and Bristol Universities.
- Plymouth – Access to success, three institutions: Plymouth, College of St Mark and St John, and Falmouth College of Art.
- Ulster/Queens Belfast – JUDE project: two institutions.
- Southern HE Consortium – seven institutions: Bournemouth, Southampton, Surrey and Portsmouth Universities; Southampton Institute; King Alfred's College, Winchester; Chichester Institute of Higher Education (now called University College Chichester).

3.14 One distinctive feature of the initiative was that projects have been concerned with a range of different kinds of activities, and four main types were evident: projects that were essentially research based; those that were concerned with the development of products (for example, CD-ROMs); those that were trying to establish some kind of base provision, either within whole institutions or with a particular group of students; and those that were located within existing disability or student services units and were trying to enhance existing provision. These different types of activities raise different challenges for dissemination and the implementation of project outcomes, and we note in Chapter 5 that – in general – those concerned with enhancing existing provision appear to have made more progress in embedding activity than the other types of projects.

Project Selection

3.15 The arrangements for project selection have changed significantly for the new round of initiative funding, and we therefore only comment in outline on the original system for project selection as part of the SLDD initiative. This was undertaken by the SLDD Advisory Group using criteria set out in bidding guidelines and conducted fairly and impartially. However, four main issues arose, all of which have been addressed under the new arrangements.

3.16 First, of the successful projects only five received the full amount requested; in 21 cases funding was reduced by 20% or more, and 14 of these received less than 50%. Payment was initiated for this group of 14 without seeking confirmation that the proposed objectives would remain unaltered, and in fact in many cases institutions had to scale back planned activities. The consequences of this delayed the start of some projects, and gave rise to other difficulties which are noted in Chapter 4. It follows that in future initiatives project objectives should always be renegotiated in such circumstances, although the Council will always have to make a judgement about the extent to which institutional bids represent the real costs of proposed activities.

3.17 Second, many projects were critical of the short timescale for submitting bids, exacerbated because the invitation to bid was published in mid-summer with proposals due on 13 September. As one respondent to our surveys noted: 'the only reason our bid was compiled successfully was that we had been preparing a lottery bid prior to this and a great deal of development work had already been undertaken.' The problem of a short deadline for proposals was particularly difficult for some potential consortium projects, an unfortunate outcome in view of the importance of collaboration as a stated objective. Although it may be reasonable for the Council to expect institutional responses on more mainstream issues within such a deadline, it needs to be remembered that many potential bidders were not experienced in proposal writing, nor familiar with typical Council requirements. Indeed at least one selector noted that many proposals failed to take account of the guidelines published, and it may be that pressure of time contributed to this. The Council has subsequently recognised the need to give longer bidding times, and has reacted to it, for example, through the two stage process for the new disability initiative and FDTL.

3.18 Third, as noted in paragraph 7.2, eQuip were not in post at the time of project selection, so only minimal support and guidance was available to potential bidders. It is to be hoped that stronger bids were made in relation to the new disability initiative because of the range of advisory services available through eQuip to bidders.

3.19 Finally, a system of single stage bidding was in place, although this has now been replaced with a two stage process. Although less time-consuming for the selectors, single stage bidding had a number of disadvantages, including the work involved for those not selected, and it also meant that the selection panel had no real opportunity to seek clarification from projects on key issues. A small number of projects appear to have been over-optimistic about what could be achieved, and it may be that a two stage process would have allowed the SLDD Advisory Group to pursue the weaknesses of proposals in more detail.

3.20 The HEFCE Audit Service report of March 1998 made a number of technical recommendations on project selection and the bidding process, which we do not consider in detail in this report. However, in general, we agree with most of their proposals, many of which have already been incorporated in the extension of the initiative.

3.21 The SLDD initiative is being followed by a further programme 'Improving provision for disabled students' (HEFCE 99/08) from 1999-2000 to 2001-02, providing £2 million a year (£6 million in total) to support 50 projects. These are divided into three types:

- Strand one: 29 projects to develop base-level provision in institutions that currently have little provision for, or experience in supporting, students with disabilities.
- Strand two: eight projects designed to promote and transfer existing disability-related expertise in recognition of the importance of extending dissemination and adoption of good practice across the higher education sector as a whole.
- Strand three: 13 collaborative projects to allow institutions to plan complementary provision in order to make best use of existing resources.

Further information on each of the projects funded in this programme is available at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/initiat/SLDD>.

4 Impact, Outcomes and Achievements of the SLDD Initiative to Date

4.1 In this Chapter we review the effectiveness of the SLDD initiative in meeting its intended objectives, and identify other outcomes for both the institutions hosting projects and the sector as a whole. It must, however, be noted that in some areas it is difficult to separate the specific contribution of the initiative from other drivers, including the new legislative requirements and changes in funding.

The Achievement of Objectives

4.2 The objectives of the initiative as set out in HEFCE Circular 9/96 (see paragraph 3.5) were stated in general terms that do not lend themselves to quantitative measures of assessing achievement; accordingly the identification of the effectiveness of the initiative must be primarily qualitative. Moreover, of its two overall aims, one almost by definition was not achievable within the three-year timescale: 'to increase the participation in higher education of students with all types of disability'. Whilst in the medium term this is obviously a central objective of the Council (in relation to both its disability policy and its widening participation activities) the initiative per se was not able to address some of the main barriers to student recruitment (funding, physical access, etc), and therefore in formal terms it could only be regarded as making a contribution to the creation of institutional conditions whereby more students with disabilities could be recruited. Moreover, the fact that the outcomes of most projects would only be in place towards the end of the funding period means – by definition – that the effect on student enrolment was most likely to be felt after rather than during the life of most projects.

4.3 Notwithstanding the wording of this aim, no accurate data exist to assess the extent to which the enrolment of students with disabilities is correlated either with particular project outcomes, or with those institutions hosting projects. For the first time, in the current year the Council are collecting data on students claiming DSAs as a basis for allocating funding, and these data will serve as a proxy

measure for the number of students with disabilities within higher education. Although HESA has previously collected data on disability these were based on self-assessment by students and are not robust (unlike DSA data which are based on an individual assessment). It follows that no comparable data are available for previous years, and it is therefore impossible to assess statistically any contribution of the SLDD initiative to increasing participation rates in higher education. However, it is also important to regard participation as not just being concerned with enrolment, but also as leading to the successful completion of studies. In future, therefore, there will be a need to collect data on the drop-out rates and successful completion rates of students with disabilities. The Council recognises this, but its achievement will not be easy.

4.4 The other aim of the initiative – 'to encourage institutions to develop high quality provision for students with disabilities' – is also difficult to assess, in that as a statement it is so broad that almost any indicators could be taken as evidence of effective outcomes. In an attempt to find some common indicators of effectiveness, in the following paragraphs we use two main measures: an assessment of the extent to which projects report having met their own objectives; and (insofar as it is possible to judge) the impact of the initiative as a whole on the higher education system.

4.5 So far as the formal objectives of the initiative were concerned, three were identified:

- a) 'To encourage wide dissemination of good practice and expertise throughout the sector and beyond.' This is largely a process objective relating to project outcomes and is considered in more detail in Chapter 5, where we conclude that while considerable good practice exists in relation to dissemination, much more needs to be done to maximise the potential of the initiative.
- b) 'To build on the momentum of previous special initiatives by helping to embed successful approaches and strategies at an institutional level.' This second objective is considered in more detail below in relation to institutional

impact, where it is concluded that many – not all – institutions are making considerable progress in supporting students with disabilities, and the initiative has played a helpful role in this.

However, the numerous pressures encouraging changes in institutional practice mean that it is difficult to establish exact causality about the impact of any single factor.

- c) 'To encourage collaborative ventures.' This third objective was, as noted in Chapter 3, only achieved to a limited extent in that five collaborative projects were funded. The management of these is considered in more detail in Chapter 6.

4.6 It follows from these observations that the aims and objectives of the initiative were, to quote the responses of one respondent to our questionnaire, 'rather vague and woolly, difficult to measure, but well intentioned', while another observed that the objectives 'were extremely broad in nature. With hindsight this is what we believe led us to provide similarly broad objectives for our own project'. However, very general objectives did provide the advantage of ensuring institutional flexibility in making proposals, with another respondent noting that 'at the time it was particularly important that institutions were able to tailor proposals to suit their particular circumstances; however, the slightly more prescriptive approach using base-line provision criteria is appropriate three years on'. Notwithstanding this advantage it would have been helpful in determining the effectiveness of the initiative if its objectives had been more clearly articulated.

The Extent to Which Projects Have Met Their Own Objectives

4.7 This is not an evaluation of individual projects; therefore, with the exception of the visits to a sample of host institutions, we have used data produced by the projects themselves (annual monitoring data and the end of project report) to assess the extent to which project objectives have been achieved. Moreover any answer to this question must take account of the fact noted above – that some projects that did not receive all the

funding requested did not formally 'scale back' their proposed activities and define new objectives, but rather attempted to do what they could with the resources available. Thus, in some cases, whilst not all original objectives proposed to the Council have been achieved, the projects have nonetheless been successful in the activities they chose to concentrate on in the light of a shortfall of funding. Clearly such a position makes any kind of evaluation difficult, and the Council has already recognised the future need for all project holders to be required to submit revised objectives if requested funding is not provided in full. This conclusion potentially applies to a wide range of initiative-funded activities.

4.8 Within this context the available data suggest that most projects have met the majority of their objectives, with some being particularly successful and a small number of others having difficulties (see below). Indeed, overall we were impressed by the claimed impact of projects on institutions, and the changes to the way that disability issues are treated. For example, typical responses to our survey of projects included: 'the project has led to the transformation of a key service for disabled students'; 'the project has been very successful within the institution'; 'it has raised the profile of disability issues enormously'; 'signs that the project has had an impact throughout the institution are very positive'; and 'there is no doubt that the project is contributing to institutional change and raising the profile of disability issues'.

4.9 A particularly important issue here is related to the fact that a number of the projects were concerned not with research, nor with the production of guidelines or materials, but rather were based on enhancing practice and located within settings where relatively small sums of additional resources could serve as a very significant stimulus to activity. As we note elsewhere, such locations make the implementation of activities much simpler than is often the case. However, it follows that projects were more likely to be successful in achieving their outcomes where they were building on existing good practice and where effective working relationships existed with staff and students.

4.10 There is less evidence of impact outside the immediate environment of student service providers (for example, in academic departments). Indeed one respondent from a project acknowledged this problem when observing that 'being totally honest, I think that in terms of the disability awareness-raising dimension of the current project, the impact has been moderate. There is clear evidence of some progress having been made. However, the frequency with which colleagues continue to report events and actions which the project ought to have eliminated is quite discouraging. If there has been an impact, arguably it has been amongst support staff rather more than amongst academic staff'. Our visits broadly confirm this view: a great deal of dedicated professional activity taking place within specific areas, whilst much still needs to be done to change behaviour and operations within institutions as a whole. It would not, however, be fair to criticise projects for this, as none was resourced to make extensive inroads into whole organisation change.

4.11 Whilst this integration of project funding with practice has a number of advantages, including enhancing potential impact, there are at least two major concerns: the demands on the time of project staff during the funding period, and the whole question of sustainability when funding ends. So far as the former is concerned, we came across a number of examples where project activities led to enhanced provision which, in turn, increased individual staff case-work. This caused some difficulties for project staff who were understandably reluctant to avoid dealing with students, although doing so placed additional pressure on achieving direct project outcomes. The second concern is more serious: whether institutions will sustain the impact of projects after funding ends. We consider this in more detail in Chapter 5, and conclude that the strong drivers for enhanced provision noted in Chapter 3 are likely to provide a favourable basis for continuing project activities in many – but not all – institutions.

4.12 We have considered whether to include short case studies of project outcomes in this report as a way of demonstrating the range of innovation and good practice being undertaken, but decided that it

would be better done as a separate publication. Although eQuip have produced a number of valuable documents on project outcomes (including the Directory of Resources which is on the HEFCE web-site at www.hefce.ac.uk under 'Learning and teaching'), a priority for the new co-ordinating team might be commissioning an attractively produced and informatively written report aimed at the higher education sector as a whole which illustrates the range of activities taking place as part of the initiative.

The Impact of the Initiative as a Whole

4.13 In the absence of reliable quantitative indicators, any assessment of the impact of the SLDD initiative must be a matter of judgement, and the following comments are based on the range of sources cited in Chapter 2. In general, the overwhelming view is that the initiative has been making a significant impact on the sector as a whole, although some institutions remain relatively untouched. Positive responses made to us range from the enthusiastic 'what fantastic value accrued from such a small investment', through to more typical comments such as 'there is no doubt that this initiative has made a significant impact on the sector', and 'the initiative has been successful in that it has allowed universities to instigate and improve the support available'.

4.14 In attempting to assess the impact of the SLDD initiative we also asked the views of two different groups of institutions: those that had recently been successful in receiving funding for the new round of projects, and those HEIs that had not applied for funding at any stage of the initiative. By definition the former group had all heard of the initiative, and not surprisingly there was general agreement on its value, with typical responses being 'the overall aims are excellent', 'the initiative is very positive', 'overall aims great, much needed', and a comment which echoes an observation made by a number of SLDD project holders, that 'there is a need to change perceptions here and HEFCE support to this student group will help influence the institution'.

4.15 We were interested to try and identify how those institutions who had not bid for funds assessed the impact of the SLDD initiative, and

chose to do this through a questionnaire to nominated institutional disability officers. Of the ten (from 14) responding to this particular question in our survey the majority identified the SLDD initiative as having a 'medium' impact in the sector, three a 'high' impact, and only one a 'low' level of impact. It should, however, be made clear that this question was put to those with responsibility for disability issues, and is most unlikely to represent awareness of the initiative within those institutions as a whole. Of the 14 respondents nine had made some kind of contact with eQuip and five had made no contact at all, and of the nine institutions five found eQuip's response 'very helpful', four 'helpful', and no institution found it 'unhelpful'. Clearly the low number of institutions makes drawing any statistically significant conclusions very difficult, but the data do suggest that the overwhelming majority of disability practitioners in UK higher education are aware of the initiative, and have generally favourable responses to it.

4.16 In the longer term, the impact of the initiative can only be assessed by the extent to which institutional practice changes in supporting students with disabilities, and in Chapter 5 we note that in some institutions the initiative has provided a significant stimulus to the development of clearer strategies and operational systems. Of course, it needs to be recognised that not all institutions will wish to move forward at the same speed, and therefore that the appropriate level of impact will inevitably vary within the sector.

4.17 The impact of the SLDD initiative has resulted from more than just the work of the individual projects and the developmental role of eQuip (see Chapter 7). In addition, the second year monitoring report noted that one of the unanticipated benefits for a number of project holders was the development of stronger professional networks, including amongst managers of student services. For example, projects involving mental health have come together to provide a significant impetus to activities in this area, including working with CVCP, SCOP and AMOSSHE to produce mental health guidelines for institutions. Such networks have an important contribution to make to the future development of

services for students with disabilities.

Reported Problems

4.18 Notwithstanding the general success of the initiative, a small number of problems have limited the effectiveness of some projects and raised issues for the Council to consider in the management of future initiatives.

4.19 First, a general problem noted in both the HEFCE Audit Service review in March 1998 (see paragraph 3.7) and the annual monitoring reports was the late start of a number of projects, particularly due to difficulties in recruiting and appointing staff. In some cases delays were exacerbated by restrictive institutional personnel procedures which did not permit posts to be advertised until formal contracts were received from the Council. In some cases such delays resulted in significant underspending in the first year, with project completion delayed until the year 2000.

4.20 Other staffing problems have also been faced: high workloads caused by the pressures of continuing service provision while undertaking project development; and in recent months difficulty in retaining key staff as they seek other jobs when their contracts near expiry. Such difficulties are partly inevitable, but in some cases have been made more difficult by inexperienced project management and by inflexibility in personnel procedures, which contrasts with the high levels of matching institutional funding identified in many of the original bids.

4.21 Second, there appears to be a small number of projects which for various reasons will not be able to deliver proposed outcomes. Although all of these have been identified by both the Council and eQuip, in some cases such identification was slightly slow to take place because of some operational confusion about project monitoring responsibilities (see Chapter 7 for a full analysis). Such problems have occurred for two main reasons: the staffing problems identified above (in one case key project staff left and were not replaced), and over-ambitious project design whose dangers might have been identified earlier. A small number of less successful projects is, perhaps, inevitable, but in Chapters 7 and 8 we consider the extent to which appropriate

management and co-ordination arrangements were provided, and conclude that in a small number of cases a more proactive and interventionist stance by eQuip might have been helpful.

4.22 Third, support for projects from senior staff within host institutions is reported as being variable, and ranges from 'senior management have been very supportive throughout this project' to almost complete disinterest. In most cases there is strong professional support from the heads of student services (or equivalent), but in some projects awareness and active participation by senior staff at vice-chancellor or pro vice-chancellor level was not always found, causing considerable frustration to project staff. It is recognised that SLDD projects are not alone in receiving variable levels of support from senior staff, but it can be argued that the considerable barriers to enhancing disability provision requires stronger central support than for some other innovations.

4.23 Fourth, in a small number of cases, whilst the immediate environment in which the project was located was supportive, considerable difficulties were faced in working more broadly within the institution where staff were unwilling to provide time or support for project initiatives. Indeed, one relatively common finding in many projects involving staff development was the difficulty of attracting academic staff to project-based training sessions, and alternative delivery strategies had to be attempted.

5 Dissemination, Institutional Embedding and Transfer of Project Outcomes

5.1 An aim of many HEFCE-funded project-based initiatives is to ensure that the activities and products developed during the course of the initiative will subsequently become embedded within the institution, and that examples of good practice are widely disseminated throughout the sector. In this Chapter we draw on a number of sources, including the third-year monitoring reports, responses to the evaluation questionnaires, findings from institutional visits and various other reports, to outline the extent of project dissemination and the degree to which institutions have been able to embed project gains.

5.2 In doing so we have adapted a straightforward classification of dissemination used by the National Co-ordination Team for TLTP and FDTL, and comments are made under three main headings:

- Dissemination for awareness and information.
- Dissemination for institutional implementation and sustainability.
- Transfer of outcomes to other institutions.

These stages form a continuum and raise a series of issues, not just about the forms of dissemination used by projects and the eQuip team but also about the conditions within institutions that enable adoption and long term sustainability after central funding ceases.

Dissemination for Awareness and Information

5.3 Ensuring the dissemination of project outcomes was one criterion that institutions were asked to comply with when submitting their bids for funding. In practice, the methods chosen to undertake such dissemination varied widely depending upon the nature of the project (for example, whether it was development of a saleable product versus production of institutional policy) and whether it was an institutional or collaborative project.

5.4 In a previous evaluation for the HEFCE of

the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (1998), a typology of activities that enabled dissemination for awareness and information sharing purposes was identified that proves illustrative for activities undertaken in relation to the SLDD initiative. The typology suggested the following range of activities:

- Awareness-raising activities, for example, newsletters, web pages.
- Encouragement activities, for example, away-days.
- Promotion of 'meaningful discussions', for example, conferences, targeted workshops, networks.
- In-depth briefings (and training) as a precursor to transfer/adaptation.
- Interactive developmental discussions leading to enhancement of practice rather than simple transfer of a specific practice.
- The provision of supporting resources (text, video, CD-ROM etc).
- The development of resources.

5.5 Examples from the monitoring reports and the questionnaires indicate that outcomes of the SLDD initiative cover the full range of dissemination activities outlined, undertaken by both the majority of projects and the eQuip team. This may reflect the level of relative maturity of the projects, as a significant number have received funding in consecutive initiatives supporting disability provision funded by HEFCE. It may also perhaps be attributed to institutions becoming more adept at managing project-based funds with a longer-term view to disseminating and maintaining project gains. Typically, in many projects dissemination activities were undertaken at two levels, both internally to raise awareness within the institution, and externally to share project findings with the sector at large. A range of publications and newsletters produced by the eQuip team have contributed significantly to this process.

5.6 However, although external dissemination for information activities were generally welcomed by projects, a good deal more needs to be done in

informing not only the sector but also those involved in disability matters about project outcomes, processes and good practice. As one respondent noted 'the networking activities begun by eQuip are a valuable first step to ensuring wider knowledge of outcomes and resources but this process has only just started... We believe that the next round of projects will gain much more effectively from developments, as this information is now more widely available'.

a) Internal Dissemination

5.7 Monitoring reports indicate that projects generally undertook a number of different approaches to disseminating outcomes within their own institutions, particularly for awareness and information. The approach used most widely was that of publicising the project's work in an internal newsletter or publication. Briefing notes and guides were also developed for distribution internally either for working committees or for academics, support staff and students. The latter generally took the form of either raising awareness of issues pertaining to a particular disability (for example, mental health or dyslexia) or a resource guide providing information on where further information or support could be found on a particular topic.

5.8 The second most utilised approach was what might be considered 'institutional guidance', typified through project staff either providing specific briefing documents for working parties or, increasingly, being asked to participate actively on strategic planning groups to ensure that issues around disability were adequately addressed and represented. Examples of institutional guidance included one-to-one consultation with individuals via e-mail.

5.9 Staff development workshops and conferences were very common means of dissemination institutionally. The activities ranged from small informal discussions once again aimed at raising awareness to longer events aimed at providing more substantial information, including during staff induction. Staff development also involved larger-scale conference events organised by the project team to launch a particular product or disseminate findings more widely. These events were

often held with input from either eQuip or Skill. Nonetheless as is noted in Chapter 4, staff development events varied in their success, and in some projects low rates of participation are reported. Where staff development activities for information provision were attempted, there was some evidence that general workload pressure on staff was leading to a preference for information delivered in writing rather than through attending a training session or meeting.

b) External Dissemination

5.10 Participation at external conferences regionally, nationally, and in some instances internationally, was by far the most often cited method of external dissemination. Presentations on activities and experiences undertaken through the life of the project were indicated on approximately 75% of the monitoring reports as the primary method of dissemination. Once again, the majority of events were organised by Skill, eQuip or other organisations with a specific remit for the disability issue in question.

5.11 Utilising external networks both formally and informally was another area in which a significant number of institutions indicated activity. The range of such networks included:

- Working with other universities to share resources and gain information.
- Using various mailbase forums relating to disability issues such as DisForum.
- Tapping into support networks such as Skill.
- Working with other education sectors including further education and schools.
- Working with local organisations such as the social services, chambers of commerce and local education authorities.
- Working with national organisations such as the RNIB, RNID and Workable.

5.12 Two final methods of external dissemination mentioned included publication of articles for professional journals and the development of web-based material.

5.13 Notwithstanding these generally favourable

comments on dissemination, a small number of projects were not proactive about dissemination, and saw the process primarily as modest internal awareness to be undertaken at the end of the project rather than part of an integrated process throughout its life. Greater contact between projects and eQuip might have helped to avoid this in some cases, and the enhanced emphasis on project support of the new NDT (see Appendix C) will also be helpful in avoiding the problem in the future.

Institutional Embedding and Sustainability

5.14 There was a very strong message in many of the monitoring reports and questionnaire returns: that student services units – and in some cases whole institutions – have made a commitment to ensure that gains made through the project will be sustained on the completion of the funding. Clearly, it was the aim of many of the projects to develop an end-product (be it policy, assessment or product) that would improve disability service provision available to students. However, it was frequently cited that the projects are enabling institutions to be better placed to respond positively to the new QAA Code of Practice and to comply with the forthcoming legislation. The document developed by Skill outlining ‘strategies for ensuring effective embedding of developments and improvements in provision’ available since 1996, may also have contributed positively in encouraging embedding project outcomes.

5.15 Institutional responses to ensuring that the outcomes of the project they were hosting were embedded within current practice were reflected within at least three areas of institutional activity: strategic planning, through core services, and within the curriculum.

a) Strategic Planning

5.16 It was clear from the responses that many institutions are starting to plan strategically for the development of disability provision, and that one part of such an approach is considering how project outcomes can be institutionally embedded. Responding institutions indicated that the strong external drivers noted above are leading to access and disability issues moving up their strategic agenda, and in some cases policies are being aligned

with institutional mission statements. Staff working in support of disability activities, once often regarded as marginalised, are now playing an increasing role in informing strategic planning and policy. Examples of senior staff (for example, pro vice-chancellors for Academic Affairs or Teaching and Learning) acting as formal ‘champions’ to ensure disability issues are adequately addressed were also given by a number of respondents.

5.17 In contrast we also came across examples where institutional policy had yet to catch up with even the modest aspirations of some project staff, and senior staff support was notable by its absence. To the extent that the SLDD initiative has deliberately chosen to build on experience and existing practice, the good examples cited above may be atypical for the higher education system as a whole, and it cannot be concluded that the position throughout the sector is favourable.

5.18 Within those institutions hosting projects and making progress in this area, activities undertaken at the strategic level included:

- Undertaking internal review of existing practice to link disability issues with provision in equal opportunities, teaching and learning and C&IT.
- Undertaking systematic and structured dialogues of issues across quality assurance headings to ensure provision.
- The development of multi-disciplinary steering groups to address issues.
- The development of multi-institutional steering group to share experiences and resources.
- Appointing staff members at departmental level with a remit relating to disability issues ensured experienced membership on strategic planning groups and encouraged effective communication at different levels.
- Continuing posts initiated through project funding in order to ‘mainstream’ institutional provision. In some instances the projects were to be continued on a self-financing basis whilst receiving institutional support in terms of accommodation and support services.

5.19 The outcome of such strategic activities is

that awareness of the need for disability issues to be addressed at all levels of policy development has been raised considerably in a number of project institutions. In many instances this has resulted in the continuation of projects being formally written into the strategic plan and becoming core services. However, this is not consistently so, and the comment of one project leader should serve as a warning: 'from information that I received, I suspect many of the projects will not bring about anticipated changes because of the lack of commitment of the senior management in HEIs'. What may bring about such changes is the combination of the consequences of inaction in the face of external pressures when combined with the examples of good practice starting to be developed.

b) Core Services

5.20 A number of project holders hope that addressing disability issues strategically will lead to embedding services and products in what might be considered the 'core services' of the institution. As noted above, a significant number of the projects are located within, or closely allied to, the student services functions, and monitoring reports indicate that many of the project initiatives (such as initial student assessment and learning support for dyslexic students) will be sustained by the institution and have become part of the core services. It was felt by one respondent that the location within student services helped to facilitate a more integrated approach to provision of services. Training of admissions staff and non-academic support staff was also felt to be important, as such individuals often form the 'front line' of student support. Indeed several projects report such staff as being much more responsive in attending training and briefing sessions than academics. It is this link between embedding and professional practice that is central to the successful adoption of some projects, and which is sometimes missing in other Council initiatives.

5.21 Another respondent suggested that the location of one particular project in an academic and research-oriented centre added further credibility to the project outcomes and helped to remove the perceived sense of marginalisation of issues. A second similarly research-oriented project,

also gained the support of the administration and will be maintained post-funding to continue the work of the project.

5.22 The establishment of inter-departmental steering committees is another approach used to facilitate embedding. Networks of 'liaison officers' who 'champion' the disability issues on departmental committees were viewed as a positive step, thus relieving the pressure of the designated disabilities staff being viewed as a single voice within the institution. Such collaborative approaches were also deemed helpful in creating a sense of longer-term ownership of both policy and resources.

5.23 One of the collaborative ventures indicated that the project has fed into an inter-university collaboration between academics, admissions departments, library services, staff development and learning centres to support students with disabilities. Wide-ranging collaboration on an institutional basis was also in evidence where strong links were established with the student union, a teaching and learning task force, computing services, and an equal opportunities committee, as well as working with the access and widening participation agendas to ensure a coherent approach to provision.

c) Curriculum

5.24 A relatively small number of projects were working in this area, although some examples were cited in the monitoring reports of embedding changes in the curriculum to address some disability issues. For example, one institution has built awareness of disability into the in-house teaching and learning certificate for academic staff. Another approach to ensuring inclusion in the curriculum was to embed disability-related issues within course monitoring and validation systems in the institution. A relatively common view amongst many disability practitioners that provided information for this evaluation, was that further work in this area is a priority if academic staff are to be fully engaged in disability initiatives.

Transfer of Project Outcomes

5.25 Although relatively little time has elapsed for the adoption of project outcomes outside the

host institution, there was some evidence that this is starting to happen, and in some instances moving into the community at large. A number of examples were provided where fees for services would be sought through undertaking assessment or training activities for other local organisations. A small number of projects were seeking further funding to maintain or build services through collaborative proposals with local education authorities or local further education colleges, which would continue to facilitate transferral of existing practice and knowledge. The mental health network (see paragraph 4.17) also provides an example of collaboration between projects influencing a policy agenda.

Conclusions

5.26 Responses in the year-three monitoring reports indicate considerable activity in both dissemination and embedding of current practice. There appears to be a stronger sense of the level and success of embedding than that reflected in the year-two monitoring report; however, this could simply reflect the projects coming to completion and another year of activity. A majority of the monitoring reports were enthusiastic about the impact of the SLDD initiative in terms of both dissemination and embedding, and this was echoed in the returns to the institutional questionnaire. This apparent enthusiasm might be tempered when placed in the larger context of the majority of institutions not having had the benefit of support from project funding.

5.27 While respondents indicate considerable effort in undertaking dissemination activities, there was a clear message that more was required if disability issues were to be considered mainstream throughout the sector. The question of whether many of the dissemination conferences were merely 'speaking to the converted' might well be raised, and if this is so then the resulting question is how most effectively to push the issues further into the institutional mainstream. The QAA code of practice may serve as an initial driver in this area.

5.28 A small number of institutions were less convinced about the level of embeddedness of the project activities within the institution during the

life of the project or upon its completion. In one case, the problem of losing key staff members, and therefore momentum of the project, was cited. Another respondent felt that the nature of the project (in this instance developing a product) did not lend itself to embedding until the ultimate completion of the product.

5.29 In summary, within the SLDD initiative there are good examples of approaches to both disseminating and embedding project outcomes. However, there is no hard evidence as to the depth or breadth of such activity across the sector. In providing data for this evaluation respondents have put forward a number of suggestions for future activities which the Council might wish to consider:

- That HEFCE should play an active role in creating a more holistic national agenda to encourage embedding disabilities into the widening participation and learning and teaching debates.
- The existing 'strands' of support for disabilities should be drawn together as a coherent institutional approach rather than being separated into teaching and learning, technology etc; this would facilitate a more holistic approach.
- There should be support in identifying resources that would facilitate wider dissemination and sharing of good practice.
- Future bids should build in a realistic budget for dissemination.
- Facilitating dissemination should form a larger proportion of the NDT's activity.

5.30 We support a number of these views, but are aware that much is already being done by HEFCE which may not yet be evident to institutions. For example, the formation of the GLTC, LTSN and subject centres provides a framework within which a more integrated approach can be developed, and indeed policy is already being developed in this area.

6 Project Management and Institutional Support

6.1 In this Chapter we discuss the way the projects have been managed within institutions (or across institutions in the case of collaborative projects). We look also at the degree of institutional support for students with disabilities and the way it is structured and positioned in management terms. In view of the expectations of HEFCE and the QAA as regards the degree of adoption of policies for students with disabilities, an effective management infrastructure is both a vital enabler and a prerequisite for effective action.

6.2 We begin by reviewing how management support has been provided to projects. We then consider how the projects themselves have been managed and the particular issues of collaborative ventures. Finally we take a brief look at the emphasis placed on evaluation within projects.

6.3 In the period since 1996 there has been a growing acceptance within institutions of the need to develop effective services for their students with disabilities. Over the three years it is reported that this has been echoed in the increase in staff numbers and the greater financial commitments to support services. As noted in the previous chapter, in the small sample we surveyed we found that all responded positively to a question about their adoption of clear policies for supporting disability provision.

6.4 It is suggested in the QAA Code of Practice in Precept 1 that 'institutions should ensure that in all their policies, procedures and activities, including strategic planning and resource allocation, consideration is given to the means of enabling disabled students' participation in all aspects of the academic and social life of the institution.' While this is not the same as saying that all institutions should mention disability provision in their strategic plans, they should ensure it happens as a result of considering it in the planning process.

6.5 In the absence of any declared strategy for services to students with disabilities, institutional commitment can only be measured by the number of specialist staff resources provided and the funds invested in facilities and staff development. No data

on these trends are yet collected, but the advent of a professional body may bring this about.

Management Support and Structures

6.6 One of the criteria which was used to assess projects' bids for funds in 1996 was the 'degree of commitment by senior management to the project'. We have noted in previous chapters that the extent of this was variable, and in the visits we made there was some evidence of this when we talked to deputy vice-chancellors or registrars who had been involved in their institutional projects. This was usually through the mechanism of a management or steering committee for the project. The reason for this involvement is self evident in an institution where disability services are limited, and there are battles still to be fought. As the eQuip Project Briefing No 1 on Project Management puts it: 'management can be very useful to you in making space, staff and facilities available'.

6.7 There is widespread debate about the ideal location in the management structure for making and implementing policy on disability provision, but there are strong arguments for suggesting it should be located at deputy vice-chancellor (or equivalent) level, preferably the one with overall responsibility for teaching and learning, or the one to whom student services reports. However, this will require broader managerial links to functions such as estates, library, admissions and examinations. The wide impact of most disability provision is reflected in one project's comment that its work was reported to ten of the university's committees. The difficulty of finding one obvious person to take charge of the function has been reflected in the management arrangements for some of the projects under review. While most have assembled a steering group, their composition has varied considerably. In the consortium projects the seniority and status of persons attending has been further stretched by the difference in scale of the partners. It has proved valuable for embedding the results of a project if appropriate senior managers are represented on the steering committee, and in their absence some committees are reported as having not worked as well as project holders would have liked.

6.8 In two of the consortium projects we visited there was a two-tier committee structure: a management committee for senior managers from the partner institutions and a steering group of external experts and project managers. In the former a senior manager was able to feed the project's recommendations into institutional policy makers, while the latter co-ordinated operational activities.

6.9 Access to key committees within the institution is also important. One project reported to an institutional disabilities action group, which was invited to feed draft assessment regulations into a committee of senate in order to ensure that all faculties conformed to good practice in providing services for students in examinations. However, as the usual institutional practice appeared to be for disability services to report through the head of student services, the committee overseeing that function took policy decisions on staffing and expansion or contraction of services.

6.10 The links to senior management vary significantly between institutions. In one project we visited there was little support from the top management, and the steering committee was a meeting of representatives from various parts of the institution with no decision making influence. This meant that the project worked on a 'bottom-up' basis and has achieved less than it could have done with effective high level support. In another institution the steering committee kept its distance from the project staff, who did not attend the meetings and were not shown its minutes. As a result the staff understandably felt excluded.

6.11 The degree of mainstreaming of services to students is often related to the length of time disability has been seriously considered, the status and credibility of the staff concerned, and the maturity of institutional policy. However, it has an organisational aspect, since the greater the number of staff in central support services the harder it may be for academic staff to feel that they themselves are directly responsible for supporting students with a disability. As an experienced worker in the field told us: 'When a staff member says to me "one of your students has done so and so", I know I have failed'. This balance between providing good quality central support and encouraging responsibility for

action within departments is difficult to achieve, and a challenge for many projects in institutions with a proven track record in provision and a core of experienced, centrally based staff is to help all academic and administrative staff to own the issues entirely in their respective spheres.

6.12 When the impact of legislation is fully felt, it is likely that the governing bodies of institutions will bear the liability of ensuring adherence to the Act. This would follow the model of the health and safety legislation, and is likely to have the effect of raising the profile of disability issues generally, which should lead to a clear designation of reporting responsibilities throughout the institution. Training for governors or members of university councils is likely to be required.

Project Management

6.13 It is common to find a recurring tension between the project structures dedicated to achieving change or innovation in the institution, and the operational management structures which are needed to make regular services work effectively. This arises because many institutions are not at a mature stage in their funding or staffing support for students with disabilities. Most practitioners are therefore engaged in promoting enhanced disability provision and seeking to change attitudes in their institutions, and only in a few cases can they concentrate on running an established service. For this reason the eQuip team has rightly spent some time helping project managers to learn the techniques and lessons of change management, and has adapted the messages on this point highlighted in HEFCE 99/55 ('Institutional learning and teaching strategies: a guide to good practice').

6.14 The eQuip team has also given attention to helping new project managers in the most recent funding round to learn about project management, although unfortunately (because of their late appointment) they were not in a position to do this at an early stage for the projects under review. However, helpful advice and material have been published (see, for example, eQuip Project Briefing no 1, July 1998) setting out many basic practical lessons. This has drawn heavily on the work of the National Co-ordination Team for FDTL and TLTP.

6.15 Possibly because of the absence of this advice at an early stage, there have been several examples of poor project management:

- One project had too ambitious a range of activities in its initial plan; fortunately these were later cut down.
- Another over-estimated the extent of the local technical capacity to produce some teaching material, and this was revealed when the author of the proposal left to go to another institution.
- As noted in paragraph 4.19, difficulties in quickly recruiting new project staff (sometimes made worse by unsympathetic institutional personnel policies) resulted in some projects starting several months late. However, HEFCE's encouragement for projects to start quickly may have influenced project managers to pursue an unrealistic timetable, although where this happened the HEFCE secretariat responded supportively and enabled funding to be reprofiled.
- Another project manager underestimated the time needed for overall project management and the value of calling on external advice. He admitted that 'external monitoring and support are vital to your project's success and a lot less scary and more flexible than you might think'.
- Some projects did not receive a visit from eEquip until they were well under way (some not at all) nor did they ask HEFCE for advice; as a result they had problems which could have been avoided.
- One project had the production of a database of available grants in its programme and it was some time before it realised that it was superfluous, as Skills were already doing this.
- A project which developed a teaching package for students found that, when the course was first advertised, there were no applicants at all; the market research had not been adequate.

6.16 As mentioned above, a continuing problem which many projects reported is the difficulty of reconciling the project function with that of providing a professional support service for students. A HEFCE report in 1995¹ found exactly the same: 'post holders could often find their time spent increasingly on the immediate problems of students to the detriment of the intended policy development'. It is very hard for any professional to set aside the needs of clients. The policy in most projects of funding parts or percentages of existing staff providing services has inevitably caused this conflict. In those cases where a full-time project manager has been funded the conflict has been less evident, except in those instances where the role of that project manager is to establish and then deliver a new service.

Collaborative Projects

6.17 In paragraph 3.5 it was noted that the SLDD initiative had three objectives, of which the third was to 'encourage collaborative ventures particularly between HEIs with significant experience of providing for students with disabilities and those with less experience'. We visited three such projects in order to test whether this objective had been achieved, and we report on the overall effectiveness in Chapter 5. In this section we focus on the particular management issues that concern collaborative projects.

6.18 There is a difference between a co-operative project and a collaborative one. In the former the partners may work loosely together but often operate different process models, and may not share solutions and outcomes. Genuine collaboration, on the other hand, involves much more integrated working, and at the outset hard work is needed to develop a collaborative approach and to build the necessary communication channels which can be used to resolve any conflicts which arise. In collaborative projects the role of project manager becomes particularly important and good interpersonal skills are an essential attribute, as success depends on managing people. Such skills

¹ HEFCE (1995). Access to higher education: students with special needs. Ref M2/95.

were not evident in all cases. Our perception is that some of the projects adopted a genuinely collaborative form of working, whereas others essentially provided a co-operative framework for partners to meet their own needs.

6.19 It has been shown in other evaluation studies that managing a collaborative project is far harder than managing a project in a single institution, with co-operative projects falling somewhere in the middle. This is particularly the case when collaboration is undertaken at the instigation of the funding body, which was the case in one – untypical – project we visited. In two other projects universities had been told to combine their activities, and it took some time for effective working relationships to develop. One such project told us bluntly: ‘forced collaboration does not work. Regional collaborations may be fragile if they arise as a result of political convenience rather than a genuine shared interest’. It is clear from the frank comments in that project’s monitoring return that its progress was plagued by clashes between the people in the institutions as they tried to work together.

6.20 Other difficulties recorded by projects in their monitoring returns included:

- The extra lead time required to set up collaborative projects and to ‘establish the staffing, structures and ground rules of collaboration and an agreed contract.’
- ‘Underestimation of the time and energy required to establish common goals, build trust and make collaboration work.’
- ‘The project lacks authority to implement recommendations across the HEIs.’
- ‘Differences in financial mechanisms, methods of payment between institutions involved and external agencies.’
- ‘The differing roles and responsibilities of senior management representatives and disability advisers in combination with the separate and distinct institutional cultures has led to variable approaches to implementation and embedding.’
- ‘The vision of the consortium members who compiled the project bid was for some time at

variance with the understanding of their managers within the HEIs.’

6.21 It is interesting that some of the difficulties listed above even arose in some projects where the collaborating institutions described themselves as experienced in working together. However, this experience in collaboration has been at a senior management level rather than at the level of disability advisers. The message to be drawn is that there will always be extra hurdles in collaborative projects from human factors and differing cultures and processes. However, the projects also show that, with sensitive management, these hurdles can be overcome. This point was emphasised by eQuip in their guidance note to institutions on collaboration.

6.22 In collaborative projects all the partners need a shared understanding of what the project hopes to achieve and a genuine commitment to collaborate. They need an explicit agreement to openness and need to have thought through staffing issues. This applies to staff who come and go during the project as well as those in it from the start. They need also to have agreed a level of transparency in financial arrangements and what institutions are contributing themselves. One of the first tasks of one project was to draw up a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ between the partners.

Evaluation

6.23 The eQuip team produced a Project Briefing note on Monitoring and Evaluation in October 1998 which defined the difference between the two and advised projects on how to set up such procedures. It is clear from the monitoring returns that project evaluation has been variable, both in the activities undertaken and the rigour with which it was pursued. In some cases comprehensive and thoughtful evaluation has been undertaken on some projects, and these may serve as good practice exemplars for those new projects currently getting under way. In other cases projects have tried to establish internal formative evaluation mechanisms of some kind, but only a few appear to use external evaluators.

6.24 A disappointing number of projects do not mention any evaluation processes or links to quality

assurance in their responses to the monitoring returns. As it is not uncommon for projects to forget (or deliberately leave) evaluation until the end of the project, we would have expected more to have mentioned their evaluation plans.

6.25 In view of the variable response to advice on evaluation processes – even though the importance of evaluation was stressed in HEFCE Circular 6/96 – it seems that HEFCE can do still more to encourage projects to take evaluation seriously. One way of achieving this might be to ask projects to identify the resources specifically dedicated to evaluation in their financial report and to allow space in project budgets for the cost of evaluation.

6.26 Where a project's work forms part of the ongoing institutional service, it falls within the regular quality review or evaluation processes which apply to the student services function. This reflects the advice in the QAA's Precept 24 that institutions should seek to evaluate the outcomes of their services in this area. In one project institution this will involve defining a service level agreement with an internal quality review committee.

6.27 Student evaluations of services are undertaken in some institutions, and one example was provided of a form which tracks the whole process from initial identification to implementation of the necessary support. One project set up reporting systems aimed to help the service to achieve a minimum waiting time for students to benefit from their services. Evaluation forms appear to have been common after most staff development or student training sessions. The whole issue of evaluating service provision for students with disabilities lies outside the terms of reference for this evaluation.

7 Co-ordination and Development Arrangements – the Role of eQuip

7.1 In this Chapter the co-ordination and development arrangements for the SLDD initiative – carried out by the eQuip team – are reviewed. The central management and monitoring processes as undertaken by HEFCE are considered in Chapter 8, and issues specific to the management of projects in Chapter 6.

7.2 As noted in Chapter 3, the co-ordination and development of the SLDD initiative and its projects was undertaken for HEFCE by the eQuip team. The team took up their appointments in the summer of 1997 (approximately seven months after the initiative started) with contracts until the end of April 2000. The team identified three key roles for themselves which have been reported to and agreed by the SLDD Advisory Group:

- The support of projects.
- A development role with higher education institutions without projects.
- An advisory role on disability issues to the Council.

In addition, eQuip have liaised with bodies such as QAA, ILT and other agencies. Below we review how each of these functions has been undertaken up to the end of April 2000, when the operational arrangements for project support changed under the new 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative. In order to meet HEFCE regulations the co-ordination arrangements were retendered, and a new co-ordination team (the NDT) came into being at the start of May 2000, still based at Coventry University but with new personnel in place.

7.3 In reviewing the co-ordination arrangements it needs to be remembered that the activities generally noted above have created a more favourable climate for the development of disability provision than was previously the case. In turn, this has meant that the concern of the Council is now more on embedding and sustaining the outcomes of the initiative, and not just – as might have previously been the case – of encouraging interest more broadly within the sector. Such changes are

reflected in the changed priorities for the new NDT, which are set out in Appendix C.

Project Support and Co-ordination

7.4 The support of projects has been undertaken in two main ways: by the provision of direct advisory services to individual projects, and through the operation of a range of information services including newsletters, workshops, publications (for example, a directory of resources made available by projects), and a mailbase list. Details of these can be found on the HEFCE web-site at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/initiat/slidd>.

7.5 So far as the project support and co-ordination role of eQuip was concerned, feedback from projects must be an important determinant of any assessment of effectiveness, and we have examined three sources of data: project monitoring reports; the responses to our own survey; and the results of discussions with a 30% sample of project holders. In general, the resulting data support the conclusion of the SLDD Advisory Group that 'anecdotal evidence suggest that the eQuip team has added significant value to projects' (SLDD/98/8).

7.6 As far as our own recent survey is concerned, most respondents expressed satisfaction with the support provided by the eQuip team, and this appears to be correlated with the amount of contact between eQuip and particular projects. Typical responses from those projects which had a significant amount of contact with the team included: 'such an enabling team has been invaluable to the success and development of existing projects. It should continue to have this role in the future to support new projects from the outset'; 'we have generally been satisfied with the functions of the eQuip team'; and 'the existence of the eQuip team has meant that the current projects have had support, guidance and advice which was not available to projects funded under the earlier initiative, a number of which may have had a greater impact had this been available'. Even where project holders had little contact with the eQuip team, the potential value of co-ordination and support was recognised, and the value of having advisers available if and when required was favourably commented upon.

7.7 Such responses support the data obtained by HEFCE Audit Service in a 1999 survey of the views of projects on some of the activities undertaken by the team. This paper has been presented to the SLDD Advisory Group and its detail need not, therefore, be repeated here, but it indicates that publications, workshops and other events were particularly welcomed.

7.8 Such favourable comments provide a strong case to underpin the need for a central co-ordination and support function, but several caveats need to be expressed:

- First, while the survey undertaken by HEFCE Audit Service suggests that the co-ordination role is generally welcomed, only 16 respondents (from the 25 of the 32 projects who replied) found the advice and support to individual projects useful. This may be related to observations made to us in a small number of cases where concern was expressed about the policy of eQuip in not visiting all projects, and the extent to which the advice of the team was of value to more experienced project holders. We return to these issues in more detail in the next section.
- Second, amongst less experienced project holders it may be the case that any reasonably run support function would be welcomed. Thus, project satisfaction is an important, but not sufficient, indicator of the overall effectiveness of a co-ordination group. This comment should not be interpreted as a criticism of the eQuip team; rather it reflects the fact that project holders are not necessarily well placed to assess whether maximum value has been obtained within the co-ordination role.
- Third, encouraged by the SLDD Advisory Group, the eQuip team have explicitly sought to provide only a support role for projects, and have not seen it as their role to intervene and monitor in order to attempt to ensure the maximum effectiveness of project outcomes (although they have done so in relation to a small number of projects that were in difficulties). Such a role is likely to find favour with most project holders, and therefore to be

reflected in their favourable evaluative comments. However, this begs two questions: Are the current monitoring arrangements adequate? To what extent should a co-ordination team seek to 'add value' to the intended objectives of projects? We return to both of these issues below.

7.9 In carrying out its audit in March 1998, the HEFCE Audit Service reviewed a number of projects, reported favourably on the co-ordination arrangements of the initiative, and noted that 'the eQuip team is an innovative approach and a useful model for future special funding initiatives'.

7.10 Notwithstanding such data, in our Phase One report we considered whether the Council initiative 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' would be better served by eliminating a central support and co-ordination function. There are advantages in such a move, most notably the opportunities for the potential release of funds spent on co-ordination for other purposes, and the encouragement of 'self-reliance' of projects to introduce their own co-ordination arrangements. Nonetheless, we considered that such a decision would be a mistake, and we are convinced that the full effectiveness of such initiatives cannot be achieved without clear support, development, management, and monitoring arrangements being in place. We are, of course, also aware of the value of effectively run co-ordination arrangements for other initiatives, most notably the work of the NCT in relation to the operation of both FDTL and TLTP. The form of such co-ordination and support remains, however, a matter of judgement.

7.11 In addition, there will probably be a need for greater levels of support for many of the new projects selected for the 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative. Accordingly, in the light of the information made available to us, in Phase One of this evaluation we concluded that there was a strong case for the continuation of a central co-ordination function, and reported this finding to HEFCE so that it could inform the retendering process in spring 2000.

The Operation of the Co-ordination and Development Functions

7.12 From the information available to us, it is clear that the eQuip team have been effective and energetic in establishing the co-ordination and development function in circumstances that were initially difficult. These difficulties included:

- Taking up their appointments in summer 1997, after the three-year funding round had started. This meant that operational systems were not in place to support projects from the beginning, but that working relationships had to be developed once projects were well-established – a much more difficult task than would otherwise have been the case. The FDTL initiative suffered similarly from the late appointment of a co-ordinating team, and the Council needs to recognise that the effectiveness and efficiency of its initiatives are not well served by such start-up problems. Accordingly, for all relevant future initiatives the Council should take all reasonable steps to ensure that suitable co-ordination arrangements are in place before the formal start date.
- The problems associated with a late start were further complicated by an additional delay in the appointment of clerical and administrative staff, and some difficulties in providing suitable office services on time. Indeed, some of these difficulties continued into the initiative: for example, for some time the three co-ordinators used different computer software because of the systems in place at their respective locations, and considerable administrative difficulties are reported to have been caused because of the operation of the financial management system at the main host university.
- The problems associated with three half-time co-ordinators working from three geographically separate locations. Although such an arrangement has a number of possible advantages, the drawbacks are also considerable, and the team has had to devote more time to its own internal administration and communication than would be normal. Such difficulties have been compounded by the long term sickness absence of a member of staff.

- As noted above, the Council decided to reduce the budget requests made by the majority of successful applicants, both to fund more projects than would otherwise have been the case and to moderate any overestimation of funds in bids. However, no requirement was made for project objectives to be reviewed as a consequence. Inevitably this placed the eQuip team in a difficult position, as by then the foundation work on projects had been undertaken and it was too late for any significant renegotiation of proposed outcomes.

7.13 Whilst acknowledging the overall contribution of the eQuip team, a number of issues about operational and organisational arrangements have emerged. Of these the most important for this evaluation are: the roles of the eQuip team; the priorities accorded to project visits; the boundaries between eQuip and other bodies including Skill, DISinHE, and representative agencies such as CVCP and SCOP; the management interface of the initiative involving eQuip, the SLDD Advisory Group, and HEFCE; and the current administrative and operating arrangements of the team. Each of these issues is considered in turn.

a) The Roles of the eQuip Team

7.14 Notwithstanding the formal responsibilities of the eQuip co-ordinators, our view is that considerable confusion and ambiguity about their exact roles existed within the sector. Both in the written responses received from projects and from observations made during our institutional visits, a significant proportion of respondents identified some confusion about the roles of eQuip, and there is no reason to think that this was not found more widely across the higher education system as a whole. This confusion involved both the scope of their roles, and also the priorities to be allocated to each of them. From May 2000 many of these concerns have been addressed under the new operating arrangements, and the management and operational structures of the NDT reflect this.

7.15 The original job description of the eQuip team was in our view inappropriate in several ways: first, if taken literally its scope was not achievable by a team of eQuip's size; second, despite the fact that the three part-time posts were titled

'co-ordinator' there was no reference to this function in the list of main roles, just references to 'liaison' and associated tasks – hence what was actually required in relation to project support and co-ordination is unclear. Accordingly, it was perfectly possible for the role of the eQuip team to be interpreted in different ways, with one view emphasising project support ('the balance of work should move from publications to visits' as one respondent to us observed) whilst another might see the development role within the sector as having parity of importance with project support (the view of the eQuip team themselves).

7.16 Such a confusion of role occurred not just in relation to co-ordination and development but also in how some of the other activities identified in the job description were to be carried out, in particular the weight to be given to 'facilitate the enhancement of disability provision in all HEFCE-funded institutions' and to 'advise the Council...on disability matters'. Both of these could – quite legitimately – have been taken, on the one hand, to imply a highly proactive approach involving a system-wide involvement in enhancing disability provision, or, on the other, a more limited commitment to disseminating the outcomes of SLDD projects to non-project institutions and advising the Council when asked. These were fundamentally different conceptions of eQuip's task, and, in the absence of clear policy statements from the SLDD Advisory Group or the EQUALL Committee, both were potentially legitimate.

7.17 A further confusion in the role of eQuip concerned the exact relationship of the team to projects, and the balance between 'support' and 'monitoring'. Leaving aside the vagaries of the job description, both the SLDD Advisory Group and eQuip have taken the view that support is what was required and that management and monitoring should be left to the Council. This raises two issues: first, was this an appropriate conception of the role? Second, with existing staffing levels, was (and is) the Council capable of carrying out a proactive monitoring function? So far as the former was concerned, several arguments have been put forward in favour of a 'supportive' approach: it was more likely to receive the support of projects; many

disability staff within institutions were reported as failing to obtain the support required from their own senior managers and therefore require a supportive external environment in which to operate; within the 'disability community' the close existing networks and collegial relationships between co-ordinators and colleagues made any more evaluative role by co-ordinators difficult; and, inevitably, many project staff would be suspicious of the motives of co-ordinators in other than a supportive role.

7.18 On the other hand, after five years of a succession of separate disability initiatives (including the first two annual project rounds) we think that such an approach is in danger of avoiding a crucial issue: that of ensuring the need to maximise the benefits of projects both to their own institutions and to the sector as a whole. Here we draw a slightly different distinction between support and monitoring from the eQuip team and the SLDD Advisory Group. We agree that the formal monitoring of projects should be done by HEFCE (and all issues concerning financial management), but believe that the support function should be more proactive than was the case, and that regular meetings with projects should be the norm rather than by the invitation of project staff (as was largely – although not exclusively – the case with the SLDD initiative). We believe our views on this issue are generally consistent with a similar position adopted by HEFCE Audit Service in their March 1998 report – that eQuip should assess the integrity of project plans and certify the quality of their results, although 'this may run counter to the original intention for eQuip'. As one project director wrote in a response to us: 'the assumption was made...that I did not need much support. In one sense this is true, but in another I could have done with someone asking me some probing questions about how exactly I was going to achieve my targets'. We agree with this sentiment, and for genuine support to be provided there needs to be a constructive rigour about the advisory and co-ordination role. Such support can only be achieved by a close working relationship which allows difficulties as well as achievements to be recognised. This suggests that, while HEFCE should deal with the contractual and

semi-contractual aspects of project monitoring, the conception of support should have been explicit enough to enable the eQuip team to have undertaken a genuinely developmental role and to have helped projects not only to deal with problems but – where possible – to enhance performance beyond what was originally conceived.

7.19 As evaluators it is not our role to suggest Council policy on such issues, but we are clear that very different conceptions of the role of the eQuip team came to exist as their function developed. We therefore support the revisions to the roles of the NDT made by the Council in relation to the recent retendering of the contract for co-ordination and development, as summarised in Appendix C.

b) The Priority Given to Supporting Projects

7.20 Given the position where the defined tasks of the co-ordinating team exceeded the time available to achieve them, priorities clearly needed to be set. It is desirable that such priorities represented an agreed view of the eQuip team, the SLDD Advisory Group, the Council, and – where appropriate – other relevant agencies concerned with disabilities. We are not convinced that complete agreement about such priorities existed, and below we comment on issues associated with providing effective project support.

7.21 In view of the conflicting demands on their time, the eQuip team (with the agreement of the SLDD Advisory Group) decided at an early stage not to visit all projects; only 17 or 18 were visited in the first year, and 23 in all. The criteria for visits set out in the eQuip operating plan 1997-99 were: collaborative projects, those 'clearly offering innovative developments for the sector as a whole', and projects 'for which an on-site visit is clearly the most appropriate form of project management support'. Instead emphasis was placed on producing publications, running events, and developing information services that would enable 'horizontal' co-ordination between projects, together with providing support on request, usually by telephone or e-mail. Such a strategy was approved by the SLDD Advisory Group as a conscious response to circumstances at the time, notwithstanding an explicit requirement of the co-ordinators' job

description being to visit each project in both academic years 1997-98 and 1998-99.

7.22 Because of the circumstances described above – and the workload pressures on the team – we understand the reasons for such an approach, but do not agree with it and feel that the Advisory Group was mistaken to agree to eQuip's proposal. Rather we take a different view: that in order for effective communication and 'trust' with projects to be established (a word used in an early progress report by eQuip), it was essential for regular visits to all projects to have taken place. Necessary as publications, events, and the development of other information services were, there was simply no substitute for visiting those involved in projects in their own institutions, and the stipulation of one visit a year in the original HEFCE job description should have been seen as the minimum. As one respondent wrote to us: 'the most useful aspect [of eQuip's work] was the personal visit... on balance more time on personal contact would seem the best way forward based on my experience'. Moreover, we would have expected the first round of such visits to have taken place speedily following the appointment of the co-ordination team. With three co-ordinators and 32 projects (31 HEFCE and one DENI), we do not see a load of ten projects per person as being excessive, and visits could have quickly been arranged.

7.23 In addition to the workload pressures on eQuip we have detected a concern that within the relatively small 'disability community' the co-ordination function needs handling with care amongst project holders who are essentially colleagues. We understand these concerns (although similar ones apply to the co-ordination of other initiatives as well), but also detect something of a paradox. On the one hand a rationale for not visiting all projects was confidence in the ability and experience of project holders, and a reliance on their maturity to seek assistance from eQuip as required. On the other hand the rationale only to undertake support and not stray into any form of monitoring was justified because of the need to bolster the confidence of project staff, particularly those who do not occupy senior positions and often lack influence in their institutions.

7.24 We also detected a slight – and perhaps understandable – unwillingness of the eQuip team to be seen as ‘experts’ amongst their professional colleagues, sometimes preferring to facilitate inter-project networking as an alternative to project visits. We understand the professional sensitivities here (and do not deny the value of the activities provided), nonetheless a co-ordination function requires expertise to be recognised if it is to be effective and add value. Indeed, as more institutions become involved in the new ‘Improving Provision for Disabled Students’ initiative the NDT should not be reluctant to become a proactive source of explicit expertise and advice, whilst – of course – offering it with care.

7.25 So far as the future demand for project support is concerned, there was unanimity amongst all respondents and the eQuip team that the demand for support and co-ordination is likely to increase significantly. In particular, the strand one projects which are part of the new ‘Improving Provision for Disabled Students’ initiative are located within institutions with little experience of disability issues and are likely to need considerable and ongoing support, a view confirmed by the sample of project bidders with whom we spoke. In order for their full effectiveness to be realised we also feel that strand two projects (networking) and strand three projects (consortia) may require considerable support. The view has been expressed that strand two projects engaged in networking activities may be able to support co-ordinating activities and assist in some form of support for strand one projects, perhaps working on a regional basis. Although the idea has attractions, we note that the funding for networking projects is relatively small and typically may only provide for part-time project support. In such circumstances we would be surprised if much spare capacity was available to assist strand one project support nationally.

7.26 We consider effective dissemination and assistance with institutional embedding to have been a central part of the project support role of eQuip, and we assess the effectiveness of this in Chapter 5.

7.27 Overall, we have no hesitation in identifying project support in all its forms as having the highest

priority in relation to future work, and accordingly we support the decision of HEFCE to identify project support as the key function of the newly formed NDT (see Appendix C).

c) Collaboration between eQuip and Other Agencies

7.28 As issues concerning disability attract greater attention within higher education, provision is likely to move away from disability being the concern of a small group of committed practitioners and towards a more formalised system where representational roles and policy making are more formally delineated. Accordingly there needs to be both clarity and coherence in the boundaries between the organisations concerned (including the NDT and others involved in disability work in higher education), as well as an appropriate location for any representational role on disabilities within the sector.

7.29 One particularly important aspect of collaboration during the SLDD initiative has been the work undertaken by eQuip with the QAA, ILT and the Council in providing advice on a range of issues, including the development of the new QAA code of practice for students with disabilities and the development of the new HEFCE ‘Improving Provision for Disabled Students’ programme. This work was important in helping to effect broader change beyond the scope of the SLDD initiative although, as a result, less time was available to eQuip to deliver support to funded projects.

7.30 In paragraph 8.4 we note some of the issues that have arisen in the management structure of the SLDD initiative, which in future will need to take into account changes in the collaborative aspects of the co-ordination role started by the eQuip team. In particular, if the drive for greater integration of disability issues into mainstream learning and teaching activity is to continue it will be important to build on the initial work of eQuip in this area. As the new NDT is rightly concentrating on project support it will not be able to be involved in sector-wide activities, so it will be important for the Council to play an active part in achieving integration. The SLDD Advisory Group is already working to ensure that other relevant HEFCE

committees and programmes, including those focussed on learning and teaching, are collaborating to deliver a more integrated approach to disability issues.

7.31 Although there is much to commend in the close collaborative working relationships that have – of necessity – developed within the disability community, during the period of the SLDD initiative it is our view that one of the consequences of such collaboration was that the boundaries between some of those involved in disability provision and eQuip was not always clear, a position not helped by any confusion in the roles of eQuip during this period (see above). It follows that the future activities of the NDT must take into account the roles of the other agencies involved, and the operating arrangements set out in Appendix C acknowledge this.

7.32 In addition, the small size of the disability network has meant that the same staff from the different agencies have often worked closely together across multiple disability projects and committees, driven by the different agencies. Such work includes professional networking, cross membership of advisory groups, and some consultancy. Given the shortage of experienced disability practitioners, this was an entirely understandable situation brought about by necessity, rather than design. However, as the number of experienced practitioners grows, the agencies involved with disability issues should be able to draw on a wider pool of expertise. This would help to ensure broad representation of the sector and reduce any potential for the sector to perceive possible conflicts of interest.

d) The Administrative and Operating Arrangements of the eQuip Team

7.33 The eQuip team members have worked energetically in discharging their responsibilities, and we are confident that the co-ordinators have exceeded their contractual workloads to the Council. Nonetheless a number of issues were raised during the first phase of this evaluation which had implications for the future operation and organisation of the co-ordination function, in particular: the half-time nature of the appointments; the lack of a nominated head to fulfil a leadership

role; and the general structure of the team. The Council has considered these following our earlier Phase One report, and revised arrangements are described in Appendix C.

7.34 In its 1997-99 operating plan the eQuip team noted that 'the unusual nature of the project team, three team members in dispersed locations and one of those new to her host institution and not physically located there, has meant substantial time has been needed in the first couple of months to plan and build robust communication and administrative systems ...'. When combined with other demanding jobs (in their non eQuip roles), such an arrangement has meant a number of logistical difficulties, including one noted by a number of respondents of the difficulty of personally contacting the co-ordinators, although it is acknowledged that messages, e-mails and faxes were always responded to. Part of the price of such a dispersed arrangement has been high administrative costs, and the operating plan for the current year suggests that in addition to administrative support staff approximately 15% of co-ordinators' time was spent on 'team maintenance'. In total over 60% of eQuip staff time (including support staff) was therefore spent on administration and related activities, but even allowing for special needs of the team, we think this figure was too high. Such a conclusion should not be taken as a criticism of the eQuip team, who have worked hard to overcome the problems of a dispersed structure, but as part of our Phase One report we concluded that these arrangements should not continue in the future, particularly when the professional demands on the time of co-ordinators is liable to grow.

7.35 In our preliminary Phase One report we also suggested that a number of changes in the organisation and staffing of the co-ordinating function were necessary to maximise the effectiveness of the 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative as new projects require support. We are pleased that most of our proposals were adopted by HEFCE, and there is no need to set out in detail issues which have now been resolved. However, in this section we do summarise a number of key issues relating to future operational arrangements made in the Phase One report.

7.36 We understand that the budget for the operation of the NDT contains a modest increase over previous funding, but, since this budget will not be capable of sustaining all activities, a clear set of priorities will need to be identified. This reinforces the proposal made above for clarification and prioritisation of the roles of the co-ordinating team.

7.37 Amongst all those responding to our requests for information there has been virtual unanimity that the requirement for project support in all its forms will increase considerably with the next round of funded projects. Moreover, it should not be assumed that only strand one projects will require such support, and the more ambitious agendas of the networking and consortium projects are also likely to need help – perhaps of a more sophisticated kind. It must be for the Council – advised by the SLDD Advisory Group and the EQUALL Committee – to determine the priorities given to the future roles of the NDT team. However, our own views are that project support and dissemination should be given clear priority, and the development function for the non-active part of the higher education sector should be undertaken only to the extent that time and resources are subsequently available.

7.38 In the Phase One report we found that assessing the likely workload associated with the growth in projects was difficult, and that much would depend on the activities that were actually proposed. However, as a rough calculation, we estimated that each of the approximately 50 projects would require two days of dedicated support a year, plus other support activities of the kind previously provided by eQuip (information services, events, publications, etc). When all such activities are taken into account this is the equivalent of approximately two full-time co-ordinator posts. Such an estimate is broadly in proportion to the current staffing of the NDT (see Appendix C).

7.39 In our Phase One report we were clear that the revised arrangements for the co-ordination and development function require the appointment of a full-time person to have responsibility for all aspects of the work of the NDT. This has a number of advantages: a clear point of contact for external

enquirers; an unambiguous reporting channel to the Council and the SLDD Advisory Group; and the possibility of concentrating key administrative services within the same location as a full-time appointment, thus reducing duplication. It would also provide a clearer focus for internal decision making within which the benefits of the collegial approach of the eQuip team can be retained but in a more structured environment.

Conclusion

7.40 It would be possible to interpret our comments in the above paragraphs as being critical of eQuip and its staff. Just the reverse is the case, and, given the constraints it has faced, it has provided an effective overall service, valued by most projects and the disability community as a whole. However, operating in a developing area of work with shifting priorities has inevitably brought issues of operation and organisation into a sharper focus than when the co-ordination role was originally conceived, and any future arrangements for the co-ordination and development role in the future should address the issues which have started to emerge.

8 The Management of the SLDD Initiative, Financial Management and Value for Money

8.1 In this Chapter, two interrelated aspects of the SLDD initiative are reviewed: its central management, and value for money and associated financial issues.

8.2 As noted in Chapter 3 the management of the initiative was carried out in a number of ways:

- Responsibility for policy rested with the Board of the Council after being advised by the SLDD Advisory Group and the EQUALL Committee, which has a broad remit for considering equal opportunities, access and lifelong learning.
- Co-ordination and development rested with the eQuip team during the period covered by this evaluation (see Chapter 7).
- Management and monitoring of both the initiative and projects were the responsibility of officers at HEFCE.

The issues arising in these different areas are considered in turn.

The Management Structure

8.3 We note in Chapter 7 some confusion about the exact responsibilities of the various parties involved in the management of the initiative, and these issues are not repeated here. So far as the management role of HEFCE is concerned, in their review of the initiative HEFCE Audit Service observed that in some projects 'concern was expressed on a perceived ambiguity in the place of eQuip in the management structure of the project [SLDD]. Was it aligned to HEFCE in which case why not communicate [projects] with HEFCE directly?' Although we do not regard the management arrangements as inappropriate, there has been the danger of a possible confusion of responsibility at the 'management interface', including doubts over the precise roles of eQuip, the SLDD Advisory Group, the 'mini' management group of eQuip including representatives of the Advisory Group, the EQUALL Committee, and the Council itself.

8.4 We also detected some ambiguity in both

projects and institutions about the role of the SLDD Advisory Group and its place within the Council structure. In Chapter 7 we note some of the future challenges posed for the SLDD Advisory Group and the Council by the need for greater collaboration. Notwithstanding its formal terms of reference, one view of its role – which appeared to be generally adopted by the Council – is that it is primarily concerned with advising HEFCE and its officers of issues relevant to the various special initiatives (including assisting in project selection), and providing guidance on a range of issues including the development of disability statements. A broader view taken by some individuals professionally involved in disability provision is that its role should be wider, and concerned with assisting HEFCE to play a more substantial role in the enhancement of disability provision. In practice the Group is moving towards advising on the integration of disability issues with mainstream activity, including generating clearer links with the QAA, ILT, LTSN and other HEFCE initiatives (for example, widening participation). It is not our task to comment on HEFCE policy in this area, but, notwithstanding the changes in the activities of the Group over time, its role could usefully be clarified.

8.5 In our survey of project holders we sought to obtain data on the quality of service and support provided to projects by those HEFCE officers responsible for the initiative. From those who have had contact with the Council we received generally favourable comments, for example, 'without exception all of these contacts [with staff at Bristol] have been positive and helpful...staff have been 'informed' about issues relating to policy and provision for disabled students – I cannot recall a single example where I have had to take time to explain anything about the context of my contact'; and 'contact with the SLDD team at HEFCE has essentially been low key. However, when support and advice has been requested the team has responded promptly and clearly'. This response is particularly encouraging in view of the fact that the HEFCE secretariat were under considerable operational pressure for much of the initiative, and only during the second year of operation were additional staffing resources made available.

Notwithstanding these comments, the fact that a small number of projects report little contact with either the HEFCE secretariat or eQuip suggests a failure that the NDT should not repeat.

8.6 If the high level of service currently provided is to be maintained, we believe that the responsibilities of the HEFCE secretariat for the management of the 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative should be clearly defined in a way that helps to establish staffing at appropriate levels of seniority to cope with the additional workload associated with the management of 50 projects under the new arrangements. This will be particularly important in the light of recent staffing changes at HEFCE.

Monitoring Arrangements

8.7 In general, projects appear satisfied with the nature and work involved in providing annual monitoring reports to HEFCE, for example, a typical view of respondents was summarised by one person as 'the project reporting and monitoring arrangements were appropriate in our view'. However, particularly for small projects, the total monitoring and evaluation load was considerable, and included: annual HEFCE monitoring; auditing as required by the HEFCE Audit Service; formative activities by the eQuip team; summative review by this evaluation; and internally through their own evaluation mechanisms. From the perspective of the SLDD initiative overall this may not be unreasonable, and indeed may be part of good project management, but it is easy to see that a hard pressed project located within a busy disability service may find it distracting.

8.8 Four main issues were identified by projects and the HEFCE Audit Service audit which may influence future monitoring arrangements:

- First, although the monitoring template provided by the Council was felt to be helpful by some projects, others found that it did not meet their needs. This suggests that the design needs to be carefully considered from a project perspective as well as by those who are collecting the data, and we understand that plans have been made to address this issue.

- Second, a number of projects observed that it would be helpful if the type of data required for monitoring purposes was identified at the start of projects or the academic year in question, as this would enable information to be collected in advance. We agree with this view.
- Third, a small number of project holders raised a concern about monitoring being seen as a 'policing process' by HEFCE whilst recognising the need for it. Associated with this view is the need for monitoring to be an open process, and the need for projects to be encouraged to learn from the identification of failures as well as recording the successful achievement of objectives. In those institutions where disability issues remain marginal, such concerns about the dangers of over-intrusive monitoring are real. However, as disability provision moves into the mainstream we would expect a more confident style of monitoring and reporting to become the norm.
- Fourth, a number of projects noted that they would like more feedback from either the HEFCE secretariat or the co-ordination team about their monitoring returns and the issues raised. Such requests are reasonable, but can only be implemented if greater clarity in the operational responsibilities between the Council and the NDT is achieved.

8.9 An important point about the future management of initiatives concerns HEFCE's role in relation to project monitoring and evaluation. Approximately 50 projects will be supported in 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students', and it should not be assumed that all will succeed. If separation of monitoring and support is to continue (albeit with the latter couched in slightly different terms from currently), HEFCE will need to ensure that adequate systems and support are available to undertake the monitoring function effectively. Very close co-operation between the Council and the new co-ordination team will be necessary if inefficiencies are to be avoided.

Financial Management

8.10 The total allocation set aside by HEFCE for the initiative was £6 million; of this, £5.1 million

was spent on projects, leaving a further £900,000 for the eQuip team, inflation updates, evaluation, external audit and monitoring, support for the National Centre for Tactile Diagrams, and with a small element being carried forward to the new programme.

8.11 In addition to Council funding, institutions were asked as part of the bidding process to identify the extent of their own resources planned to support projects. It would have been helpful if we could have relied on these figures as evidence of the scale of commitment by institutions, but the range of estimates submitted calls their accuracy into question. One institution, for example, claimed that its notional contribution amounted to six times that of HEFCE, while another suggested that it had contributed nothing. A number of institutions appeared to be generous in their interpretations of matched funding, and included a range of overhead costs and mainstream service commitments. It was not in our brief to audit any of these figures, but we suggest that if the Council requires genuine matched funding to be part of the project selection and bidding process then some clear guidance to institutions is needed if the information is to be relied on, and the advice of the HEFCE Audit Service may be useful in considering how the subsequent commitment of institutional funding can be monitored.

8.12 In order to provide financial data for the Council, we attempted to analyse expenditure according to the categories of project in Table 3.1, to show, for example, how much was spent on dyslexia or staff development. However, this has not been possible owing to the spread of activities in some projects, and many have no detailed analysis of the cost breakdown between them.

8.13 A recurring issue throughout the project has been the delay in getting started with staff in post. As a result of these late starts only nine of the 32 projects completed their work on schedule at the end of 1999. Ten are expected to be completed in the period January to June 2000, and the remainder in the last six months of 2000. This created a number of problems for accounting in some institutions, but it is reported by HEFCE that these should not be repeated in future.

Value for Money

8.14 The value for money of the SLDD initiative can be assessed in the established way by reviewing the economy of its expenditure, the efficiency with which the funds were spent, and the overall effectiveness with which it has met its objectives. As this last topic is the subject of Chapter 4, we do not repeat that discussion here.

8.15 The HEFCE Internal Audit Service visited six projects in 1999 with a set of internal control questions to test the 'strength of project management', 'progress on the objectives', and 'funding and compliance issues in terms of the financial control and accuracy of the returns to HEFCE'. Their report was positive and found that returns were accurate, expenditure was 'appropriate' and that institutions were also exercising appropriate controls. However, a recommendation that financial reporting should be in line with institutions' financial years was not adopted, as it would have implications beyond the project in question.

8.16 There have been two projects where significant value for money problems arose: in one a visit from eQuip and a HEFCE auditor was required before it was decided to go ahead with the original aims; in another the project failed to enrol any students to use a virtual package it had developed. This latter project does not finish until August 2000 so that students may still enrol for the 2000-01 year.

8.17 More generally, there are two broad value for money questions which need to be addressed in relation to the SLDD initiative overall:

- Was it necessary for HEFCE to provide this funding if institutions were already finding the funds for their disability services internally?
- How much input is needed to pump-prime activities which institutions must do anyway in order to conform to external pressures?

8.18 The first question relating to the value for money of the SLDD initiative is that of additionality, or whether HEFCE funding is essential. On this there are four main possible positions:

- First, that HEFCE funding was unnecessary since most institutions have developed provision on their own, or will do so in the future. An unsuccessful bidder, commenting in response to our questionnaire, wondered if the initiative 'does not work to the relative disadvantage of HEIs which have supported developments from their own recurrent resources'.
- Second, that general funding was not required, but that it was necessary to pump-prime those institutions (usually small or specialist) to whom the extra cost would be a particular burden. One such who had not been successful in the tender reported that the 'outcome (unsuccessful) has led to great despondency in a small and new HEI with zero additional funds to support disabled students'.
- Third, that HEFCE support was not necessary for core institutional activities, but should be limited to more experimental projects and broad national programmes. Another unsuccessful applicant put the point well and noted that 'our own institution, like others, has addressed areas of need with regard to disabled students anyway without HEFCE initiatives and is likely to continue to do so in line with University policy on equal opportunity and widening participation. Real value has been seen in the pump-priming of national debate, research in areas of particular concern and the subsequent professional networking and sharing of expertise in the sector'.
- Fourth, that the changes in both regulatory arrangements and HEFCE and government policy on widening participation and access mean that assistance to institutions was necessary for the development of provision. If this view is accepted, a further question is whether funding should be mainstreamed and available to all (as in the case of the institutional strand of TQEF funding), or whether it should be provided on a more selective basis in order to enhance existing good practice and development expertise within the sector.

8.19 The three strands of funding in 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' announced in

HEFCE 99/08 and described in paragraph 3.2 can be linked to these comments. Strand one is reserved for those institutions that have not been able to develop a base provision for students, while strands two and three concern dissemination and collaborative activities which institutions are rarely willing to finance themselves. In many other similar programmes HEFCE has found that these activities have to be supported from their funds, since there is no incentive for institutions to embark on time-consuming activities which benefit others.

8.20. In the SLDD initiative a high proportion of those institutions getting funds had tried before in the earlier annual initiatives but had been unsuccessful. Sixteen of the 24 who replied to our questionnaire had previously submitted bids to an earlier initiative and 15 of these 16 had been unsuccessful. The fact that they then bid again would support the argument that they needed some external support to ensure that proper provision was developed.

8.21 The second key value for money question concerns the scale of HEFCE support: was it correct and was funding adequate? In some projects very modest sums were invested with which to create a new disability service, and were small enough to be capable of being met through mainstreamed institutional funding in future years. Any assessment of value for money has to be placed in the context of 1996 when the decision to go ahead with the initiative was taken. This was before the advent of the QAA and the application of full legislation, and when a minority of institutions had developed services for students with disabilities. At that stage there were still arguments to be won about whether this activity was necessary, and in many institutions the shortage of resources was no doubt used to defer significant provision.

8.22 A major theme of this evaluation is that much of the initiative has been successful, although not necessarily when set against a formal interpretation of its original aims and objectives. There have undoubtedly been a number of projects which have provided very good value for money; some that have left behind an operational service where none existed before; and many that have helped to spread good ideas and procedures among

other fellow professionals. Thus, we feel able to reach a positive conclusion overall on the benefits and outcomes, even though no quantifiable evidence is available. The other main outcome is the less tangible one of a higher education community which is better informed and enabled to practise.

8.23 The number of collaborative projects is too small to draw specific conclusions on value for money in this area. However, any evaluation of the new round of collaborative projects in 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' might consider this issue in more detail.

8.24 The Council will, however, wish to consider carefully the value for money of any further initiatives following 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students'. This programme provides an important dissemination element to inform the sector further, and also to encourage provision in those institutions where little activity currently exists. When that is complete, the case for a further initiative cannot be assumed, and the balance between institutions resourcing disability provision from their own funds and continuing HEFCE special support will need to be revisited.

9 A Summary of International Comparisons

9.1 In this Chapter we review briefly how the SLDD initiative compares with other approaches in three main countries: the USA, Canada and Australia, and in Appendix B a fuller report on activities in these three countries is provided. Such comparisons are not, however, without problems in that definitions of what constitutes disability varies between countries, and differing legislative requirements place a range of demands on institutions.

The United States

9.2 In the USA statistics collected by the American Council on Education's HEATH Resource Centre reflect increased participation by students with disabilities in US higher education institutions during the last two decades. HEATH's annual survey on college freshmen shows that the percentage of students with disabilities rose from 2.6 per cent in 1978 to a steady average of approximately 9 per cent since 1991. The benefits accruing from tertiary education for people with disabilities are documented in a recent statistical profile by the US Department of Education's National Centre for Education Statistics. This study found that the percentage of high school students with disabilities both seeking and achieving entry to higher education remains lower than the comparable percentages of their non-disabled peers, and that drop-out rates are higher among students with disabilities; those who do succeed in completing their degree achieve full- or part-time employment in the same ratio as non-disabled college graduates, and receive similar rates of pay. Graduates with disabilities also succeed in enrolling in postgraduate study at the same rate as their non-disabled counterparts.

9.3 In 1995, a programme standards committee of the US Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) was entrusted with the task of developing national standards for disability services programmes. This identifies 27 programme standards representing 'those service components that are fundamental for assuring equal educational access for post-secondary students with disabilities'

(AHEAD 1999). It is intended that the implementation of these standards, 'identified as essential regardless of type of school, ...funding source, ...location, ...or competitiveness' should provide more consistency across institutions and help students with disabilities by simplifying the selection of post-secondary services. In a sense this activity is a parallel to the development of guidelines by the QAA in the UK on disability provision.

9.4 We found evidence of two main national initiatives which have relevance for the work of the SLDD initiative. The first is a national clearing house on post-secondary education for individuals with disabilities (the HEATH Resource Centre), which receives financial support from the US Department of Education and serves as an information exchange on 'educational support services, policies, procedures and adaptations and opportunities at American campuses, vocational-technical schools and other post-secondary entities'. The work of HEATH is similar to that of Skill in the UK.

9.5 A second programme closer to the SLDD initiative is Office of Postsecondary Education 'Demonstration Programs for Quality Higher Education for Students with Disabilities'. These have been developed with the aim of training academic staff 'on how best to educate students with disabilities'. The Demonstration Programs initiative takes the form of grants awarded to higher education institutions for a period of three years. The value of these grants ranges from \$50,000 to \$500,000 and institutions applying for them may pursue between one and three activities, which include: developing strategies to train academics and administrators to teach students with disabilities more effectively; synthesising research related to providing educational services to students with disabilities; and disseminating project activities to other institutions to meet the post-secondary educational needs of students with disabilities.

9.6 In addition, funds for projects focused on students with disabilities can also be accessed by US universities and colleges via two other grant programmes administered by the Office of Postsecondary Education as part of its FIPSE

initiative. To qualify for LAAP funds, institutions must be working with one or more partners (other higher education institutions, employers, technology companies, etc) to deliver innovative distance education programmes 'anytime and anywhere'. The FIPSE Comprehensive Program provides funding for projects relating to a wide range of issues, such as: teaching and learning; academic staff development, access, retention and completion; curricular and pedagogical reform. Dissemination of successful innovations is an important feature of the programme. Since, however, these funds are not earmarked specifically for disability-focused projects, the competition is tough. One example of a disability-focused project which won LAAP funding in 1999 involved a number of institutions in collaboration with MadDuck Technologies. The project, receiving \$861,000 over four years, aims to 'serve individuals with disabilities by significantly improving their access to post-secondary online learning opportunities', and is very similar to the DISinHE project supported by JISC.

Canada

9.7 In Canada in 1991, only 6.2 per cent of Canadian men and 5.6 per cent of Canadian women with disabilities had a university degree (compared to 15 per cent of men and 12.2 per cent of women in the non-disabled population). As with US research, it has been found that 'college and university education is key for many people with disabilities if they wish to compete in the labour market'. The majority (78 percent) of 424 higher education students and graduates with disabilities who participated in a 1996 survey on employment opportunities (NEADS 1996) indicated that their education had provided them with the skills needed for some kind of employment.

9.8 Although higher education policy in Canada is the responsibility of the provincial governments, the development of a 'co-ordinated national approach to services, accommodations and policies for post-secondary students with disabilities' is the aim of the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS). Echoing the AHEAD initiative in the USA, a NEADS research project, beginning in 1997, aimed to create recommended

national standards in the area of service provision and to review policies, programmes and practices at individual Canadian institutions in order to develop a 'best practices' model.

9.9 There are several sources of financial assistance in Canada from federal and provincial agencies which are aimed at students with disabilities. These include the 'Employment Assistance for Persons with Disabilities' programme, which 'supports a broad range of programs and services to respond to the full spectrum of needs of people with disabilities'. The Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Postsecondary Education considers that this initiative, along with small study grants for students with disabilities, 'have already had a significant impact on the ability of people with disabilities to access post-secondary education', and it is hoped that a new initiative, the Millennium Scholarship Fund, 'could play an equally significant (and perhaps more positive) role'. This fund, worth 2.5 billion Canadian dollars, will start issuing grants in 2000; in 1999, the final scope and parameters of the fund had not yet been defined, but responses to the consultation document sent out to heads of institutions indicated strong support for the inclusion of 'disadvantaged groups' among the Fund's potential beneficiaries.

Australia

9.10 In Australia, by 1997, persons with a disability made up 2.4 per cent of the higher education student body. As in the USA and Canada, there has been a higher than average rate of increase in students with 'less visible disabilities', such as learning difficulties, psychiatric problems, chronic fatigue syndrome, or attention deficit disorder. Although the Federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) of 1993 obliges Australian higher education institutions to provide students with a disability with access to an education that is equal to that provided to other students, it provides little guidance to institutions on specific issues such as unjustifiable hardship or reasonable accommodations. Steps have been taken, however, both by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) and the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) to remedy this defect.

9.11 In 1996, the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee issued its 'Guidelines Relating to Students with Disabilities' (AVCC 1996). Starting from the premise that 'universities should aim to provide students with disabilities with the opportunity to realise their individual capabilities and to gain access to and participate in university life', these guidelines cover: institutional policy, organisation and planning; recruitment, admission and enrolment; academic support; physical access; staff development and access. In 1998, DETYA also commissioned a code of practice for Australian tertiary institutions relating to students with disabilities (O'Connor et al 1998); this followed on from earlier 'Guidelines for Disability Services in Higher Education' produced by the Higher Education Council in 1994.

9.12 In 1990, Australia's Commonwealth Government identified people with disabilities as one of six groups to be targeted in terms of improved access to higher education. Universities are expected to take responsibility for improving the participation in HE of these 'equity groups', but the government has provided funding (5 million Australian dollars per annum) through its Commonwealth Higher Education Equity Programme (HEEP) (DETYA 1999a). These funds have been linked to universities' equity performance and are allocated to universities as part of their operating grant.

9.13 A programme particularly relevant to the SLDD initiative is the 'Co-operative Projects for Higher Education Students with Disabilities' (CPHESD), the broad aim of which is to encourage cross-institutional arrangements and to develop, through co-operation, cost-effective ways of providing support services to students. Funding was provided to a host institution in each state, which would then co-ordinate the development of joint projects. Initially projects involved only a few institutions, but in some cases expanded to include other institutions. One of the most high-profile examples was the Tertiary Initiatives for People with a Disability (TIPD) project run by eight universities in Queensland.

9.14 In evaluating CPHESD, DETYA's Evaluation and Monitoring Branch concluded that, despite

some difficulties, projects 'appear to have had a significant impact on providing better support services to students with a disability'. The co-operative nature of the initiative had enabled institutions to approach disability issues from a wider perspective than that of the needs of the individual student, and had helped to foster institutional links. Many of the 'outputs' of projects had been distributed and shared between institutions at both the local and national level. However, the extent to which actual embedding actually took place was unclear.

Conclusions

9.15 All three countries have thought it important to develop national programme standards or codes of practice in order to ensure an even standard of service provision for students with disabilities. A commonality of approach can also be seen in the establishment of national clearing houses for disability issues in higher education in the USA and the UK, with Australia now explicitly choosing to adopt this model.

9.16 In terms of funding models, the USA and the UK appear to have adopted a similar approach, with project-based grants awarded to institutions on a competitive tender basis. There is the expectation that the products of these winning projects will then be disseminated widely within the higher education sector. In Australia, federal government funding has, hitherto, been distributed on a regional (rather than competitive) basis, but the co-operative project model, with funding allocated to a lead institution, has elements in common with the US LAAP programme, which emphasises 'creative partnerships' within and outside higher education, and with the latest phase of the SLDD initiative. Similarly, regional and national dissemination of project 'outcomes' is judged to have been one of the greatest strengths of Australia's co-operative projects. Canada has not, as yet, adopted a project-focused funding model; support for students with disabilities takes the form of financial and other help directed either at institutions or at individual students, with provincial governments seemingly taking quite disparate approaches to the level of support assigned to this student constituency.

9.17 Not surprisingly, a number of common themes arise from both the national guidelines and the funded initiatives within the different countries. These include:

- The need for written policies and guidelines and for the development of disability action plans with stated targets.
- The importance not merely of establishing policies and services for students with disabilities but of making sure that information on these services is proactively disseminated, both by higher education institutions and funding agencies, to current and prospective students.
- The importance of considering the needs of students with disabilities at the planning stage, particularly with reference to large-scale capital projects or IT purchases.
- The US Demonstration Program projects put a strong emphasis on academic and administrative staff development; professional development is likewise an important feature of Australia's CPHESD projects. The need for funding in this area is emphasised by Canada's NEADS study, which found that institutions judged their own performance in this area as relatively weak.
- The need for better provision for students with disabilities in the area of innovative distance learning which is being tackled by LAAP-funded projects in the USA, by the University of Southern Queensland's new DIP project and by Canada's ADAPTECH project.
- The retention of students with disabilities and facilitating their transition to higher education is the focus of US projects funded by the FIPSE programme; in Australia, both the RDLO activities and, for example, Queensland's TIPD project, put a similar emphasis on encouraging the transition from school to tertiary level education.

9.18 While the administration of co-operative projects has not been entirely problem-free, and issues such as the duplication of effort by institutions in different regions have yet to be completely resolved, the evidence from Australia, Canada and the USA generally supports the

effectiveness of targeted funding for students with disabilities. Access to higher education has improved, and students with disabilities have a raised profile within higher education and a better awareness of the services available to them (though there is still room for improvement here). In Canada, CADSPPE judged that specific funding initiatives had had 'a significant impact' on improving access, while the Australian CPHESD and RDLO initiatives were judged, respectively, by their evaluators, to 'have added value' and to 'have proved a successful means of providing assistance' to students with disabilities and disability staff.

9.19 From the viewpoint of HEFCE in considering the future of the 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative, it is worth bearing in mind the comments made by Australian disability officers to the effect that, since disability initiatives are often concerned with changing deep-seated attitudes, short-term funded projects are unlikely to succeed in embedding lasting change. Such comments reflect a broad experience of achieving change within academic environments, and within this context the future work of the LTSN in relation to the benefits of disability provision for students will be particularly important.

10 Issues for Future Disability Initiatives Arising From the Evaluation

10.1 In this Chapter we bring together a number of issues concerning policy lessons for the operation of future disability initiatives. We have not sought to summarise the numerous operational issues previously reviewed. The following points are not in any order of priority, but are a set of largely independent points that have emerged from the evaluation and will require the attention of HEFCE and other agencies.

10.2 HEFCE has supported a number of effective initiatives that are now well established (for example, several disability programmes, FDTL, widening participation), but from both an institutional and a national policy perspective there is a danger of them being seen as separate activities. A number of respondents at all levels felt there was merit in attempting to ensure a more integrated approach to providing a 'joined up' strategy to encourage institutional change. At an institutional level this could involve such measures as incorporating policy on disability into teaching and learning, estates, and other relevant strategies. Nationally, it would involve greater co-ordination between HEFCE, CVCP, SCOP, QAA, ILT, LTSN, DfEE and so on. We very much support this view, and commend it to the Council.

10.3 Another aspect of integration that might be considered is the extent of co-operation between the new NDT and other relevant co-ordination teams, for example, the NCT, and the widening participation team. Although links exist (and the NCT were helpful during the early stages of activity by eQuip), some of the constraints affecting the SLDD initiative reported above have been very similar to those concerning FDTL and other programmes, for example, the need for better project management skills, and greater sharing of innovative practice in relation to dissemination. Some overlap of interests appears to exist here, and, despite the obvious logistical difficulties, appropriate forms of collaboration between co-ordination teams might be explored to see if efficiency and operational gains can be achieved.

10.4 In Chapter 5 a number of specific proposals are made for enhancing dissemination of awareness and information across the sector, and these are not repeated here. Just as 'joined up' activity is needed at a policy level, it is also required in relation to dissemination, and considerable synergy could be achieved by closer collaboration between the new co-ordinating team, DISinHE, Skill, FE initiatives, EU funded projects, and other relevant agencies.

10.5 Amongst those who take a proactive stance in encouraging good practice for providing support to students with disabilities, there is concern that (with the exception of Skill) there is no organisation which has consistently provided strong leadership in the area. This may change with the formation of the National Association of Disability Officers (NADO) – although this is still in its early stages – but a number of project holders would welcome a much more proactive stance by CVCP, SCOP, and other representative bodies in encouraging disability provision. This would be a helpful step in what one respondent described as the need 'to find ways of engaging the interests and commitment of VCs, Pro-VCs, and Registrars across the sector. Unfortunately it can be fear of the law rather than a genuine desire to improve provision that is the key motivator'. We agree that such a step is necessary, although, unlike the respondent, have no concerns at all about using legal, regulatory and audit frameworks to ensure compliance in key policy areas.

10.6 This evaluation raises major issues about the extent to which a co-ordinating team should seek explicitly to add value to projects or whether the primary role is to support projects to meet their original objectives. This question applies to other initiatives as well. In practice, there is a significant difference in measuring project effectiveness in terms of whether the original objectives are achieved, or whether the project goes well beyond those objectives and attempts to maximise its impact. We came across a number of projects which, although undertaking good work and effective in their own terms, would be capable of greater achievements if appropriate external advice and stimulus were regularly available. The provision of such support raises a number of issues about the nature, role and experience of co-ordinating teams,

and the need for clear articulation of Council policy on this. If maximising value-added was the desired outcome, it might be possible for HEFCE to reinforce this by adopting a suitable funding model (for example, funding as a reward for achievement), but this would require very careful consideration.

10.7 Amongst those involved in the provision of disability services to students, many identified the need for additional research and commissioned work as a priority. For example, management and planning information is generally weak. Also, for example, one person observed that although the extension of the DSA to part-time students is welcome, almost nothing is known about the effectiveness of the DSA – including how students use it, and whether it is an efficient way of resourcing provision. Similarly, it may be helpful if consideration were given to funding a project similar to the AHEAD programme in the USA or NEADS in Canada (see Chapter 9).

10.8 The lack of available quantitative information in relation to disability provision is particularly worrying. Therefore one priority should be to develop this as speedily as is practicable, for without it management will inevitably be somewhat speculative, and comparisons either over time or against objectives will be difficult. We note in Chapter 4 the work of HEFCE on developing DSA-based data and the benefits this will bring.

10.9 Although the introduction of institutional funding for students with disabilities is welcomed by almost all the project holders we met, there is widespread concern that in many institutions it may not be used solely to meet the costs of provision for students with disabilities. To avoid this a number of respondents argued for some type of ‘ring-fencing’ of funding, whilst recognising that this might be difficult for the Council to adopt. Nonetheless HEFCE may need to find ways of ensuring that money allocated to support disability provision and widening access is broadly spent on those purposes.

10.10 In Chapter 7 we considered the respective roles of eQuip and the new NDT, Skill and other agencies, and concluded that it was necessary to be clearer about the respective roles and contributions that all such groups can make. Disability provision

in the past has been characterised by a shortage of resources and a small group of professional staff working closely as a network in order to make the most efficient use of available skills. Different arrangements will be needed if disability provision is to be a mainstream activity, with more transparent structures that are consistent with the needs of the sector as a whole. We understand that these are now being put in place, and welcome such steps.

10.11 Although it is clear that considerable progress on disability provision in the sector is now being made, there remain some institutions, large numbers of departments, and literally thousands of academic staff who have been almost untouched by the developments reported above, even where activities are relevant to some of their own students. The challenge of enhancing provision in this context should not be underestimated. In particular, because of the observations made in the course of this evaluation, we would expect a number of institutions to be in significant danger of breaching the new legal and regulatory frameworks that are being introduced, with potentially severe penalties. A priority for the sector – with appropriate encouragement from HEFCE – must therefore be an information and training strategy to ensure that all institutions and staff are fully aware of their forthcoming responsibilities.

10.12 In discussions with the Council, it is clear that they are aware of many of these issues and propose to take various kinds of measures, both within and outside the new LTSN framework. In doing so it will be important to continue to build on the good working links that have been established between HEFCE and many of those involved with disability provision within institutions.

Appendix A: A List of Projects Funded by the SLDD Initiative (1996-99)

Institution	Name of Project
Anglia Polytechnic University	Regional Learning Support Service (RLSS) Project
City University	Joint Initiative for Development and Dissemination of High Quality Disabled Student Support
Coventry University	Enhancing the Quality of Learning Experience for Disabled Students
Edge Hill College of HE	A Regional Resource Centre for Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties
Lancaster University	Disability Advisory/Support Services
Leeds Metropolitan University	Enhancing Disability Provision
London Guildhall University	Assessment and Resource Centre
London Institute	Enhancing the Course Offer to Disabled Students
Loughborough University	Tactile Diagrams
Nottingham Trent University	Building on Strengths
Open University	Digitally Recorded Educational Audio Media (DREAM)
Oxford Brookes University	Implementing Equal Opportunities for Disabled Students
Sheffield Hallam University	From Access to Assessment: An Enhanced Support Programme for Disabled Students
Surrey Institute of Art and Design	Enhancing the Quality of Support for Access to the Curriculum
South Bank University	CD-ROM and WWW Resources for Study Skills and Staff Development
Southampton University (Southern HE Consortium)	Establishment of Southern HE Consortium
Staffordshire University	High Quality Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
UMIST (the SUMMIT consortium)	Promoting Provision for Disabled Students Through Collaboration etc
University of Bradford	Dealing with Disability
University College Northampton	Widening Access, Removing Barriers to Learning (WARBL)
University of Central Lancashire	Towards a Whole Institution Approach on Disability and Deafness
University of East Anglia	Learning Support for Students with Disabilities
University of East London	Setting Up an Access Centre
University of Hull	To Develop and Disseminate Enhanced Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities

University of Leeds	Clinical Placement Access Evaluation for Students with Physical Disabilities
University of Leicester	Supporting Students with Mental Health Difficulties: a Whole Institutional Approach
University of North London	Quality and Equality: Extending and Enhancing Provision for Disabled Students
University of Nottingham	Mental Health, Hidden Disabilities and Learning Support
University of Plymouth	Access to Success
University of Teesside	Increasing Access to Learning – a Student Centred Approach
University of the West of England	Joint Assessment Centre
Ulster/Queens Belfast	The JUDE Project

A short description of each of these projects is available at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/initiat/SLDD>.

Appendix B: International Initiatives Focused on Students with Disabilities

Introduction

1 This section of the report offers a review of some of the initiatives undertaken in the USA, Canada and Australia² to improve higher education access for disabled students and to ensure that these students enjoy the best possible educational experience. Due to the limited time allowed in the project budget for research on this topic (three days), this Chapter focuses mainly on efforts within these countries to draw up national standards of service provision or codes of practice, and on government funding initiatives, whose similarity to HEFCE's own SLDD initiative makes them most likely to afford instructive comparisons.

United States

Context

2 Statistics collected by the American Council on Education's HEATH Resource Centre (see paragraph 7 below) reflect increased participation by students with disabilities in US higher education institutions during the last two decades. HEATH's annual survey on college freshmen shows that the percentage of students with disabilities rose from 2.6 per cent in 1978 to a steady average of 9+ per cent since 1991. The importance of not only launching, but also publicising, disability-focused legislation and programmes/services was emphasised at a joint ACE-HEATH meeting in 1999, where a representative from George Washington University – where the number of disabled students has risen consistently since 1984 – attributed this increase to a greater awareness of disability-related laws and improved programmes and services.

3 The benefits accruing from tertiary education for people with disabilities are documented in a recent statistical profile by the US Department of Education's National Centre for Education Statistics (Horn and Berkold 1999). Although this study

found that the percentage of high school students with disabilities both aspiring, and achieving entry, to higher education is still lower than the comparable percentages of their non-disabled peers – and that drop-out rates among disabled students are also higher – students with disabilities who do succeed in completing their degree achieve full- or part-time employment in the same ratio as non-disabled college graduates, and receive similar rates of pay. Graduates with disabilities also succeed in enrolling in postgraduate study at the same rate as their non-disabled counterparts.

National Programme Standards for Disability Services

4 In 1995, a programme standards committee of the US Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) was entrusted with the task of developing national standards for disability services programmes. Following a survey of more than 1,000 disability service professionals in the USA and Canada, the team identified 27 programme standards representing 'those service components that are fundamental for assuring equal educational access for post-secondary students with disabilities' (AHEAD 1999). It is intended that the implementation of these standards, 'identified as essential regardless of type of school, ...funding source, ...location, ...or competitiveness' should provide more consistency across institutions and help students with disabilities by simplifying the selection of post-secondary services.

5 According to the standards proposed by AHEAD, the work of an office providing services to students with disabilities falls into nine categories:

- consultation/collaboration/awareness;
- information dissemination;
- faculty/staff awareness;
- academic adjustments (accommodations);
- instructional interventions;
- counselling and advocacy;

² Judging from the country overviews in Hurst's recent book on international approaches to higher education and disabilities (1998), other European countries are lagging behind the UK in terms of provision for students with disabilities in HE.

- policies and procedures;
- programme development and evaluation;
- training and professional development.

6 Individual standards particularly worth noting include:

- The provision of disability representation on relevant campus committees.
- Dissemination of information via institutional publications on disability services and how to access them.
- Provision of individualised disability awareness training for academic and administrative staff.
- Provision of information to academic staff regarding general assistance available from the disability services office.
- Assisting students with disabilities to assume the role of self-advocate.
- The development of written policies and guidelines relating to institutional and student rights and responsibilities with respect to service provision.

National Clearing House: the American Council on Education's HEATH Resource Center

7 An important resource for staff and students in US HEIs, comparable to the UK's national bureau, Skill, is provided by the HEATH Resource Centre, the national clearing house on post-secondary education for individuals with disabilities. HEATH receives financial support from the US Department of Education and serves as an information exchange on 'educational support services, policies, procedures and adaptations and opportunities at American campuses, vocational-technical schools and other post-secondary entities'. Its positioning as part of the American Council on Education presumably helps to bring disability issues out from 'the fringe' and to bring them to the attention of a more general HE audience. In 1999, for example, HEATH sponsored a panel presentation on 'accommodating students, faculty and staff with disabilities' as part of ACE's annual meeting.

HEATH's other activities include: an electronic newsletter which includes articles on recent

legislation; publications focused on the experience of college freshmen with disabilities and on women and disability; and a campus collaboration campaign, which brings together disability support staff and education abroad staff with the aim of increasing the number of students with disabilities in education-abroad programmes. It is interesting to note that Australia has recently taken the decision to follow the national clearing house model adopted in the USA and the UK (see paragraph 59 below).

Funding Initiatives

Office of Postsecondary Education: Demonstration Programs for Quality Higher Education for Students with Disabilities

8 The 1999 ACE-HEATH meeting (see paragraph 7 above) served in part to publicise a new initiative administered by the US Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education.

9 The Demonstration Programs for Quality Higher Education for Students with Disabilities have been developed with the aim of training academic staff 'on how best to educate students with disabilities'. Two of them specifically focus on teaching academic staff how to work with students with learning disabilities, a group which has enjoyed increased representation in US HEIs in recent years. At George Washington University, for example, 50 per cent of the students with disabilities either have learning disabilities or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders. The Demonstration Programs initiative takes the form of grants awarded to HEIs for a period of three years. The value of these grants ranges from \$50,000 to \$500,000, and institutions applying for them may pursue between one and three activities, which include:

- Developing strategies to train academics and administrators to teach students with disabilities more effectively.
- Synthesising research related to providing educational services to students with disabilities.
- Disseminating project activities to other HEIs to meet the post-secondary educational needs of students with disabilities.

10 The Office of Postsecondary Education holds technical assistance workshops in several major

cities to help individuals who are interested in applying for these grants. In 1999, the first year of the awards, 22 projects were funded. Examples of successful projects include:

- The Preparing Postsecondary Professionals (P3) project at California State University, Northridge, which focuses on improving the access of educational settings for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Project goals are to create 20 in-service training modules 'designed to provide insight and instruction' for academic staff and HE administrators; to provide and evaluate innovative in-service training and technical assistance to academic and administrative staff; and to increase the capacity of these staff to have a better understanding of the needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and to meet those needs. This last goal is to be achieved by the creation of model demonstration packages (best practice examples, white papers, presentations, publications) and the dissemination of these project products.
- Utah State University's project focuses on developing a replicable training programme to teach academic staff, teaching assistants and administrators to provide accommodations to students with disabilities, and on developing and implementing a support system to enable these staff to carry out the accommodations. The three project goals are: (a) to develop, implement and evaluate a three-tier training curriculum (for faculty, teaching assistants and administrators) in the form of a multimedia CD-ROM based programme; (b) to replicate these programmes systematically via distance education technology with academic staff at remote sites through Utah State's extension offices and at other HEIs; (c) to replicate the programmes and disseminate the curricula nationally, via partner institutions in the national University-Affiliated Programs network and with the help of several national associations which will disseminate information on the programmes to their constituencies.
- The project run by the University of Rhode Island is called 'Changing the Culture' and aims to develop, demonstrate and evaluate a curriculum package for a professional

development week-long seminar which will equip disability resource mentors with the skills and supports needed to teach students with disabilities. These mentors will then facilitate formal and informal professional development for staff within their departments. The package will then be disseminated to post-secondary institutions throughout the State of Rhode Island and to the Northeast Technical Assistance Centre consortium of HEIs. The overall aim is to enhance the inclusion and retention of students with disabilities.

11 Though this project is still in its early stages, the similarity of the model to HEFCE's own SLDD initiative, and in particular the emphasis within projects on evaluation and dissemination of products on a regional and national scale, suggest that it would be valuable for HEFCE to keep a watching brief on its progress.

Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE): Comprehensive Program and Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships (LAAP)

12 Funds for projects focused on students with disabilities can also be accessed by US HEIs via two other grant programmes administered by the Office of Postsecondary Education as part of its FIPSE initiative. To qualify for LAAP funds, institutions must be working with one or more partners (other HEIs, employers, technology companies, etc) to deliver innovative distance education programmes 'anytime and anywhere'. The FIPSE Comprehensive Program provides funding for projects relating to a wide range of issues such as teaching and learning, academic staff development, access, retention and completion, curricular and pedagogical reform. Dissemination of successful innovations is an important feature of the programme.

13 Since, however, these funds are not earmarked specifically for disability-focused projects, the competition is tough. In 1999, for example, the first LAAP competition attracted 653 preliminary proposals; 122 proposals reached the final round and 29 of these won funding for projects lasting from three to five years.

14 One example of a disability-focused project which won LAAP funding in 1999 again involved

Utah State University, in partnership with the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), Western Governors University and MadDuck Technologies. The project, receiving \$861,000 over four years, aims to 'serve individuals with disabilities by significantly improving their access to post-secondary online learning opportunities'. It will tackle 'the pervasive problem of websites and courseware that have not been designed for the needs of persons with disabilities' via:

- A national dissemination effort to inform and assist post-secondary institutions to identify web accessibility problems.
- Development of a model of training and technical assistance for post-secondary web developers, followed by live training events broadcast to 150 post-secondary sites.
- A course development tool to support web access at post-secondary institutions.
- Dissemination of a document to guide institutional co-ordination of accessibility standards to at least 1,000 HEIs.

15 Under the FIPSE Comprehensive Program, six projects focused on disabled learners received funding in 1998. These included the DO-IT 2-4 project at the University of Washington which aims to help students with disabilities successfully make the transition from community and technical colleges to four-year institutions, 'with a special focus on challenging academic fields'. The project takes a learner-centred approach and uses the Internet, mentoring, and staff and student training to help students increase their independence and productivity and to develop self-advocacy and leadership skills. The START project at San Francisco State University uses the model of a problem-solving team, composed of several students with disabilities plus a peer mentor. With help from staff and students in SFU's Rehabilitation Engineering Technology training programme, the team identifies and addresses individual participants' needs in living with a disability both on and off campus, with the aim of improving student retention. At the end of the first year, the project team reported that 'the problem solving

team model has proven very successful' and that it had begun planning dissemination activities, including conference presentations.

Canada

Context

16 According to research from the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) (see paragraph 17 below), '[Canadian] youth with disabilities face tremendous difficulties' in accessing post-secondary education and then making the transition to work after graduation. In 1991, only 6.2 per cent of Canadian men and 5.6 per cent of Canadian women with disabilities had a degree (compared to 15 per cent of men and 12.2 per cent of women in the non-disabled population). As with US research (see paragraph 2 above), it has been found that 'college and university education is key for many people with disabilities if they wish to compete in the labour market'. The majority (78 per cent) of 424 disabled students and graduates who participated in a 1996 survey on employment opportunities indicated that their education had provided them with the skills needed for some kind of employment.

National Standards of Service Provision: National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS)

17 Although higher education policy in Canada is the responsibility of the provincial governments, the development of a 'co-ordinated national approach to services, accommodations and policies for post-secondary students with disabilities' is nevertheless the aim of the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS). Echoing the AHEAD initiative in the USA (see paragraph 2 above), a NEADS research project, beginning in 1997, aimed to create recommended national standards in the area of service provision and to review policies, programmes and practices at individual Canadian institutions in order to develop a 'best practices' model. This project was funded for a 16-month period, partly by the federal government via Human Resources Development Canada's Learning Initiatives Fund, and partly by the Trillium Foundation, an agency of the Ontario Government which ensures that a portion of the province's

lottery profits are directed towards social issues. It represented, in part, a response to the expressed need of students and graduates with disabilities who said that it was 'very important' to assess services available to them at post-secondary institutions before making decisions about higher education study (NEADS 1996).

18 Based on survey responses from 70 institutions, this report showed that more than half the institutions (usually the larger ones) had an office specifically devoted to students with disabilities; another quarter catered for disabled students as part of general student services. The remaining institutions either had no disabled student services, or catered for the small number of disabled students on their campus on a case by case basis. The model of service delivery for students with disabilities was usually centralised or partially centralised, with more than half the respondents (usually larger institutions) receiving an operating budget from their institution, and another quarter funding their operations with money from the provincial government. Most institutions, regardless of size or type, provided some services that were funded by an outside source, typically via a provincial or federal government programme. Some provincial programmes are cost-shared with the federal government. An important source of funds was Employment Assistance for Persons with Disabilities (see paragraph 22 below).

19 NEADS found that only 59 percent of the institutions surveyed provided written materials to students with disabilities concerning services available to them, though universities and colleges scored better in this respect than the smaller Cégeps (community colleges). Around 75 per cent of student respondents received financial aid in the form of benefits, a pension or a grant (from public and private sources). Accessibility was an important factor in deciding to attend a particular institution, but not as important as the academic programmes offered by that institution. Most students became aware of the disability services offered at their institution through their admissions package, that is, only after they had made a decision to attend that institution. When asked which aids or services they would like, but currently lacked access to, the

largest numbers of students indicated adaptive technology and/or academic accommodations, such as extended examination times, or alternative formats for academic materials.

20 In assessing the services available for disabled students, institutions and students agreed in rating Internet access and accessible computer labs highly in most institutions. Institutions prided themselves on their safety/emergency measures, but a large number of students were not aware of these! Academic support services, such as note-takers, library assistance and extended examination time, were again rated highly by institutions and students alike, but again a significant percentage of students were unaware that these services were provided. Support and training for instructors was an area where institutions felt that they performed less well, pointing to difficulties in providing such training and the indifference of instructors. This aspect of the survey findings suggests that Canadian HE might benefit from a programme equivalent to the US Demonstration Programs initiative discussed above.

21 Consequent on the findings of this study, NEADS recommended that:

- Disability service provision must be fully supported by post-secondary institutions and governments with sufficient financial and human resources to meet student needs. They called for a commitment to funding via enhanced federal transfer payments and an allocation of funding to HEIs from provincial governments.
- Students must be able to receive the best and most appropriate education regardless of their geographic location; support to students should therefore be fully portable.
- Since rates at which students had accessed publicly funded provincial bursary programmes varied considerably from province to province, and students in some provinces were possibly not aware of these programmes, governments needed to make their information simpler and more readily accessible, while in HEIs, staff responsible for disseminating information on financial aid should make sure that relevant information reached disabled students.

- Within institutions, students needed more and better information on the aids and services they might need to complete their studies. Institutions must therefore proactively advertise their services, rather than just responding to requests. Similarly disability-focused information should be directed at prospective students. Institutions also needed to disseminate information on emergency/safety procedures more effectively.
- Within HEIs disability service providers should play a crucial role in educating the whole campus to play a role in establishing an accessible environment.
- Since (as in the USA) students with learning disabilities are a growing category of students in Canada at the post-secondary level, instructional strategies that addressed the needs of these students needed to be more broadly taught through in-service programmes.
- Adaptive technology centres should be housed within or close to other facilities such as the library, and should ideally provide training in the use of technology and software. Institutions also need to help members of their IT staff to understand how adaptive technologies interact with the computer systems available to all students on campus, so that disabled students have the same access to the Internet, etc as everyone else. Better provision of learner support services, such as note-takers was also required.
- In terms of physical accessibility of the campus, planning and greater consultation with students and other partners would help to prevent problems of oversight. All HEIs should have a definite plan, with appropriate funding allocated to improve physical accessibility within established deadlines.

Federal and Provincial Initiatives for Students with Disabilities

22 There are several sources of financial assistance in Canada from federal and provincial agencies which are aimed at students with disabilities. Canada Study Grants for Persons with Permanent Disabilities provide a maximum of 5,000 Canadian dollars for students with permanent disabilities, to

cover exceptional expenses, such as note-taking or interpretation services, or technical aids such as a braille or an adapted computer. Sixty per cent of each grant is provided from federal funds and 40 per cent from provincial. These grants are, however, only open to students who are eligible for student loan assistance, and funding is limited, with grants awarded on a 'first come, first served' basis. Federal and provincial governments also share the costs of the Employment Assistance for Persons with Disabilities (EAPD) programme, which 'supports a broad range of programs and services to respond to the full spectrum of needs of people with disabilities'. Under EAPD, provinces may choose to fund areas such as post-secondary education, skills training, assistive aids and devices, but concern has been voiced by the Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Postsecondary Education (CADSPPE 1999) that provincial governments have recently begun to direct their EAPD funding away from higher education towards areas more closely connected to the labour market. Despite this, CADSPPE consider that both these initiatives 'have already had a significant impact on the ability of people with disabilities to access post-secondary education', and it is hoped that a new initiative, the Millennium Scholarship Fund, 'could play an equally significant (and perhaps more positive) role'. This fund, worth 2.5 billion Canadian dollars, will start issuing grants this year; in 1999, the final scope and parameters of the fund had not yet been defined, but responses to the consultation document sent out to heads of HEIs indicated strong support for the inclusion of 'disadvantaged groups' among the fund's potential beneficiaries.

23 At the provincial level, government funding strategies to institutions vary from province to province. Wolforth (1998) praises, for example, the Government of Ontario which bases its disability services grants on the FTE enrolment of each university, not on the number of students using the service. As a result, universities like Toronto have received significant amounts of money. By contrast, the policy of provinces like British Columbia, where funding for students with disabilities is provided as part of global university budgets, makes it less

certain that these students and services receive the intended support. Quebec is singled out for its supportive stance towards students with disabilities: each university gets targeted funding, based loosely on the number of students with disabilities. Individual students can also get funding to cover the costs of services like note-taking or sign language interpretation and for specialised equipment. This help is available to all disabled students, regardless of full- or part-time status, and it is not dependent on the student being a recipient of financial assistance. There is also financial assistance towards living costs, and support for students with disabilities who are moving on to postgraduate study. Students with learning disabilities, however, are not eligible for these funds, though there is a separate project within the Ministry of Education which provides some funding. In Alberta, by contrast, 'there is little targeted funding available'.

24 Apart from straight financial assistance, the Government of New Brunswick, for example, has its own Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons, whose activities include a document (also published on the web) detailing around 40 different awards, bursaries, scholarships and programmes available to persons with disabilities. At the national level, NEADS' own directory of national scholarships and grants for post-secondary students with disabilities lists 17 different schemes, some sponsored by major corporations such as the National Bank of Canada and CanWest Global System Broadcasters, others by individual donors. Other examples include the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) which is responsible for services to residents of Atlantic Canada under the age of 21 who are visually or hearing impaired. Separate resource centres for each type of impairment offer programmes for students, assessment and consultation services, and a teacher education programme (deaf students only). In Manitoba, the Career Options for Students with Disabilities programme places students in career-related jobs within provincial government departments, usually in the summer vacation. This helps students with disabilities to make the transition from education into the world of work.

Office of Learning Technologies: Adaptech Project

25 At the national level, Human Resources Development Canada has its own Office of Learning Technologies, which in Autumn 1997 provided funding for the Adaptech Project conducted by Dawson College, Montreal. This aimed:

- To evaluate the use and utility of computer and information technologies in the post-secondary education of students with disabilities.
- To make available empirical data to better advise: students, HE staff providing services to disabled students, planners, policy makers from government and academia, developers and suppliers of mainstream and adaptive technologies.

26 The most important finding of the study (Fichten, Barile and Asuncion 1999) related to student concerns over the high cost of acquiring and maintaining computer, information and adaptive technologies. Most home computer equipment used by students with disabilities had been paid for by themselves or their families. Many students were not aware of the existence of government programmes to help them to obtain a computer or adaptive technologies. Once again, this study emphasised the importance of disseminating information to students with disabilities about available funding and services, both on the part of providing agencies and by disability and financial aid focused staff within HEIs.

27 The report also recommended 'creative partnerships and alliances' between disability service staff, professors, academic computer staff, adaptive technology and computer specialists, librarians, rehabilitation professionals, HE administrators and government representatives to ensure that 'the broadest based consultations take place within HEIs and in organisations providing equipment and training for students with disabilities'. Such consultations must, of course, involve the students who are the end users. It is also imperative to take into account the needs of disabled students at the planning stage for purchasing campus-wide IT systems.

Australia

Context

28 By 1997, persons with a disability made up 2.4 per cent of the HE student body in Australia. Though this failed to match the percentage of disabled persons within the relevant population group (4 per cent), it represented a 'sizeable increase' from the previous year (1.86 per cent) (DETYA 1999a). Access for disabled persons did, however, vary considerably between universities, with disabled students representing between 0.5 per cent and 9.1 per cent of the student population. The universities in 1997 with the highest proportion of commencing students with disabilities were Southern Cross University (9.1 per cent), Wollongong University (6.1 per cent), Flinders University of South Australia (5.0 per cent) and the University of Canberra (4.1 per cent). As in the USA and Canada, there has been a higher than average rate of increase in students with 'less visible disabilities', such as learning difficulties, psychiatric problems, chronic fatigue syndrome, or attention deficit disorder.

29 Disability staff within the HE system have attributed this increase in part to the number of disabled students successfully completing high school, and to a greater recognition of a broader range of disabilities which means that more students register as having a disability. However, improved staff awareness and better integration techniques, and improved dissemination of information about the support services available, are also cited as important factors explaining the higher take-up of places by students with a disability. Many staff, though, also indicated that it was becoming increasingly difficult to support the needs of this growing number of disabled students using existing resources (Redway and Heath 1997).

30 Encouragingly, the retention rate for students with a disability was almost identical to the rate for other students (0.99 as opposed to 1.0), but the success rate for students with disabilities was slightly lower, 94 per cent of the rate for other students.

Codes of Practice and Guidelines

31 Although the Federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) of 1993 obliges Australian HEIs to

provide students with a disability with access to an education that is equal to that provided to other students, it provides little guidance to HEIs on specific issues such as unjustifiable hardship or reasonable accommodations. Steps have been taken, however, both by the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) and the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) to remedy this defect.

32 In 1996, the AVCC issued its Guidelines Relating to Students with Disabilities (AVCC 1996). Starting from the premise that 'universities should aim to provide students with disabilities with the opportunity to realise their individual capabilities and to gain access to and participate in university life', these guidelines cover: institutional policy, organisation and planning; recruitment, admission and enrolment; academic support; physical access; staff development and access. Recommended practice includes:

- The development of a policy on students with disabilities.
- The identification of a member of staff responsible for co-ordinating delivery of disability services.
- The development of a disability action plan including performance targets and strategies for achieving these.
- The inclusion of explicit reference in recruitment materials to opportunities for people with disabilities to enter HE and the provision of these materials in appropriately accessible formats.

33 In 1998, DETYA also commissioned a code of practice for Australian tertiary institutions relating to students with disabilities (O'Connor et al 1998); this followed on from earlier Guidelines for Disability Services in Higher Education produced by the Higher Education Council in 1994.

Financed by a grant from DETYA's National Priority (Reserve) Fund, this document: 'establishes principles and guidelines for planning and delivery of services to students with disabilities across the tertiary education sector; recommends national minimum standards of service and support; and

identifies and documents good practice in institutional responses to students with disabilities'. Areas covered include: institutional obligations; staff and student rights and responsibilities (this section emphasises the importance of good communication between staff and students with disabilities); policy development and implementation; planning (both strategic and in terms of physical access); student recruitment; selection, admissions and enrolment; teaching and learning; service provision. Of particular interest are the 'good practice' examples from individual institutions, which not only provide potential sources of inspiration to other institutions, but might also serve to identify partners for disability staff interested in benchmarking their activities on either a national or international basis. Institutions whose practice is consistently highlighted in O'Connor's report include: Griffith University; Southern Cross University; Deakin University; University of South Australia; Queensland University of Technology; University of Western Sydney, Macarthur.

34 Almost a year on from its publication and the distribution of 7,500 copies (in standard print and other formats aimed at the disabled user), the authors reviewed the Code's impact on practices in the sector (Hartley et al 1999). Though responses to a brief survey distributed via the ozuni-disability listserver were returned from only six institutions, five of these indicated that the Code had been widely distributed and was being used in conjunction with the development of a disability action plan. One institution reported that guidance officers in the school system were using it to outline to students with disabilities planning to enter higher education 'what they should be looking for in the way of services and supports'. In three cases, the Code had been endorsed by senior management. The authors did, however, note one difficulty in implementing the Code as being 'the conservative mood of the electorate and the impact this has on government treatment of disadvantaged groups'. While acknowledging the positive impact of government initiatives over the past decade in improving access for people with disabilities, there is an implicit warning against assuming that the rights of, and conditions for, student with disabilities will

necessarily continue to improve. Elements of DETYA's new Disabilities Initiative Programme announced in September 1999 (see paragraphs 59-60), which is likely to have disappointed some disabilities campaigners, tend to bear this warning out.

Funding Initiatives

35 In 1990, Australia's Commonwealth Government identified people with disabilities as one of six groups to be targeted in terms of improved access to HE. Universities are expected to take responsibility for improving the participation in HE of these 'equity groups', but the government has provided funding (5 million Australian dollars per annum) through its Commonwealth Higher Education Equity Programme (HEEP) (DETYA 1999a). These funds have been linked to universities' equity performance and are allocated to universities as part of their operating grant.

36 As regards students with disabilities specifically, the then Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) began in 1991 to earmark funds under the HEEP programme to help institutions undertake co-operative, cross-institutional projects. Four years later, government funding was also directed to a new initiative, which focused on establishing Regional Disability Liaison Officers for HE in each state. Both initiatives have now been evaluated, and the findings of the evaluation reports may well be of value to HEFCE in deciding the future of its own SLDD initiative.

Co-operative Projects for Higher Education Students with Disabilities (CPHESD)

37 The broad aim of the CPHESD initiative was to encourage cross-institutional arrangements and to develop, through co-operation, cost-effective ways of providing support services to disabled students. Funding was provided to a host institution in each state, which would then co-ordinate the development of joint projects. Initially projects involved only a few institutions, but in some cases expanded to include other institutions. At the end of each year, the host institution was required to submit a report detailing the previous year's activities, which would include an assessment of their effectiveness and possible wider applicability.

38 Funds were not to be used for the provision of support services for individual students at particular institutions. From a government standpoint, CPHESD represented a relatively low budget project, with funding between 1991 and 1997 totalling 3.6 million Australian dollars with an average annual allocation of 600,000 Australian dollars.

39 Examples of CPHESD projects included:

- Staff and student seminars to raise awareness of disability issues.
- Community awareness programmes for students and parents.
- Professional development seminars and the development of training packages for staff.
- Development of resource materials such as guidelines for alternative examination arrangements.
- Research projects on issues of common concern.

40 One of the most high profile examples was the Tertiary Initiatives for People with a Disability (TIPD) project run by eight universities in Queensland. Its activities and products included:

- An Internet outreach to link secondary and university students with disabilities and link disability staff in schools and universities.
- A Unitaste programme for Year 10 and 11 school students with a disability.
- Forums addressing learning disability and psychiatric disability.
- A staff development videotape called Creative Teaching: Inclusive Learning.
- Provision of information on a wide range of assistive technologies via its web-based TIPD-tech database.
- Ten publications covering topics such as teaching strategies, making the transition to HE, and making the transition to employment.

41 In 1997, DETYA's Evaluation and Monitoring Branch began an evaluation of the CPHESD initiative (Redway and Heath 1997), which aimed to 'assess how well co-operative projects had encouraged cross-institutional arrangements and

co-operation at the state and national level', with particular focus on the usefulness of project products (in terms of cost-effectiveness and meeting student needs), the overall benefits to students with disabilities, and the degree to which state and national cross-institutional arrangements and co-operation had increased.

42 The evaluators found that generally there was a high level of participation in the co-operative projects, although within some of the larger states levels of participation varied considerably. For example, in New South Wales, involvement in, and awareness of, the initiative seems to have been poor within those institutions not located in Sydney. 'Cross-institutional co-operation, while good in theory, was sometimes difficult to achieve in practice'. In some cases, institutions were 'struggling to work co-operatively', with some problems stemming from the 'typically competitive environment in which the larger city universities operate'. Institutions also felt hampered by the funding structure of the initiative. Aspects such as the granting of funds on an annual basis only, requiring institutions to select and complete projects within a short time frame, and with no guarantee of continued funding, were criticised by some participants.

43 One of CPHESD's greatest strengths was judged to be the quality of its outputs, which included written resources, seminar series, research papers, forums, an annual Pathways conference, video material, information brochures and handbooks. Examples of resources include the New South Wales project's Accommodations handbook, which outlined strategies for teaching students with a disability, and a publication from Victoria which documented some of the resources and publications available for disabled students. Encouragingly, it was found that many of these resources had been shared among institutions both at the state and national level.

44 Several projects focused on raising the profile of students with a disability within HE. Northern Territory University, for example, held open and community forums, staff workshops, building audits and debates as part of its Take a Good Look campaign. Staff development was another important

issue for the projects, and some of them developed training packages which would enable disability staff to conduct professional development seminars.

45 The scope which the initiative offered to institutions to conduct research on issues related to student disabilities was also judged to be particularly beneficial. A research project at Curtin University of Technology, for example, aimed to 'develop a demographic profile of students with mental health problems, determine the impact on educational progress, highlight successful support mechanisms and obtain students' opinions on how the university could better support their needs'. In South Australia, research has focused on the social integration of students with a disability in HE.

46 The evaluators concluded that the CPHESD projects 'appear to have had a significant impact on providing better support services to students with a disability'. The co-operative nature of the initiative had enabled institutions to approach disability issues from a wider perspective than that of the needs of the individual student, and had helped to foster institutional links. Many of the projects 'outputs' had been distributed and shared between institutions at both the local and national level. 'The time saving and supportive benefits of sharing resource materials, ideas, advice and information were seen as invaluable'. Staff acknowledged the value of having funds targeted specifically for students with disabilities, but awareness that this funding was limited had led some states to select projects on the basis that they could subsequently be incorporated into university policy and funded from the university's general operating grants. Redway and Heath note, however, that the extent to which this embedding actually took place was unclear.

47 There was some degree of concern also that states were still duplicating efforts to complete similar projects, and a feeling that this could not be eliminated without a national co-ordinating body. Though CPHESED projects had helped to raise the profile of students with disabilities, the 'negative attitudes of some academics and an unwillingness to acknowledge or support the needs of students with a disability' was still seen as a widespread problem. In terms of administration and management of the projects, there was a general feeling that more

guidance was needed from DETYA on expenditure of the funds and that feedback on the project's annual reports would be helpful.

48 Recommendations included: a switch to triennial funding grants, as this would allow universities to address issues requiring a longer-term approach and to consult other states and territories regarding proposed projects; greater administrative support from DETYA; and better co-ordination at the national level. The evaluation had found sufficient evidence that the funding had been 'adding value' to justify continued support, and suggested three possible options:

- Continuation of the programme with some minor changes (as above).
- Combining CPHESED funding with that for the RDLO initiative (see below) which would make it easier to justify the administrative costs of a national office.
- Allocation of some or all of the funding to a national body, or university, which would co-ordinate 'projects of national significance' in areas such as research and staff development. In this case, funding for individual projects would be awarded competitively, on a tender basis.

49 The decision taken by DETYA regarding the future structure of disability-focused initiatives is discussed in paragraphs 59-60 below.

Regional Disability Liaison Officer (RDLO) Initiative

50 The RDLO initiative was announced in 1993-94, with initial funding of 750,000 Australian dollars per annum for three years (a fourth year of funding was subsequently granted in 1996-97, extending the programme into 1998). Its aim was 'to develop and foster high quality services to higher education students with disabilities through the appointment of Regional Disability Liaison Officers'. Altogether 15 such officers were appointed, with most posts being established by mid-1995. Most states had one RDLO, but New South Wales had five, while Victoria and Queensland each had three officers. The evaluation of the RDLO initiative was undertaken late in 1997 by DETYA's Evaluation and Monitoring Branch,

with the final report published in 1999 (Kable and Heath 1999).

51 In the eyes of RDLOs themselves, the most productive activities arising from the initiative were:

- Facilitating networking between disability workers, schools, technical and further education (TAFE) institutions, universities and the community.
- Involvement in co-operative projects such as UniAbility (a university survival guide for students with a disability) or Speaking Up, a package designed to encourage students with a disability to come forward when they needed assistance.
- Provision of information and advice to school, TAFE and university staff regarding work and study opportunities for students and graduates.
- Educating tertiary and school staff via seminars on disability legislation, the difficulties faced by students with a disability, and the responsibilities of all staff towards such students.
- Organising and/or operating an Internet presence (for example, listservers such as the ozuni-disability e-mail discussion forum and/or web pages).
- Participating, particularly in the capacity of education-disabilities expert, in committees and other similar groups.
- Organising regional forums for disability workers from all relevant sectors.
- Identifying and initiating a particular disability service.

52 Examples of less productive activities, cited by the RDLOs, included trying to compile statistics on disability in schools and trying to address issues in remote regions. In some cases potentially useful activities were ineffective, left incomplete or only accomplished with undue difficulty 'due to unforeseen circumstances or obstruction'. Some problems were encountered as a result of high staff turnover among RDLOs in some states, and difficulties in filling vacant posts since 'RDLOs are required to have considerable experience in disability management'.

53 The impact of the initiative was felt to be greatest where RDLO positions had been most stable. Small institutions had particularly benefited from the initiative, since disability staff in these institutions were more likely to become isolated. Overall, the evaluators found 'overwhelming evidence' for the success of the RDLO initiative in making an impact on the range and quality of services offered to HE students with disabilities. In most cases university DLOs and equity officers thought that the RDLO positions supplemented existing services. Furthermore, the RDLO posts helped to foster a useful cross-sector approach to disability provision, incorporating schools, TAFE and HEIs. The ability of the RDLO to take a 'hands off, big picture' approach was also felt to be valuable. In the context of higher student numbers and reduced or static funding for disability services, the co-ordinating role taken by the RDLO was also seen as essential for achieving the best use of available resources.

54 Generally, the strengths of the RDLO initiative were seen as:

- The establishment and strengthening of disability networks.
- The cross-sectoral nature of the initiative and the RDLO's impartiality.
- The ability to address disability issues from a wide perspective.
- Facilitation and co-ordination of disability services.
- Raising the profile of students with a disability within the HE sector.
- The level of expertise of the RDLOs.

55 Weaknesses were felt to be:

- Over-involvement by the RDLO with the affairs of the institution hosting his/her post.
- Potential duplication between the work of the RDLO and the university DLO.
- Lack of understanding of the initiative by the rest of the sector, a problem that could be addressed by a national RDLO marketing exercise.

56 As with the CPHESD initiative discussed above, respondents felt that the initiative had suffered as a result of its short funding period and the uncertainty regarding programme continuation. Though it had been a priority of the initiative that the work of the RDLOs should be self-standing or become embedded practice within the HEIs they serviced, one RDLO commented that 'to effect change in the attitudes of staff who have worked in traditional settings such as universities takes a great deal of time, persistence and energy...the movement in attitudes is just beginning'.

57 The evaluators' recommendations, likewise, echoed those arising from the CPHESD project, with a focus on:

- The need for secure long-term funding.
- Improved national co-ordination and communication among RDLOs, for example, via an annual conference, a dedicated e-mail discussion group, or the funding of a national co-ordination post.
- Better information from DETYA (as it now was) to the sector on the roles and duties of the RDLOs, so as to avoid duplication of effort.

58 Suggested options for the future were:

- Integration of the RDLO activity into a new national disability unit.
- Continuation of the RDLO initiative under the umbrella of a national disability unit based on an existing organisation such as the Tertiary Education Disability Council of Australia.
- Retention of the existing model with some improvements (as above).

One danger of the national body model would, however, be the loss of 'direct communication with local practitioners, students, organisations and members of the community'. The evaluators, therefore, suggested that the third option be 'given consideration as a viable future direction for the initiative' given its success 'under basically these arrangements to date'.

DETYA's Disability Initiatives Programme (DIP)

59 In the event, however, DETYA opted, in September 1999, to focus on national

co-ordination. Its new Disability Initiatives Programme (DIP) provided total funding of 433,000 Australian dollars for a range of initiatives, including a national clearing house to be established by Deakin University in conjunction with the Tertiary Education Disability Council of Australia (TEDCA). The influence of 'a successful model already in use in the UK and the USA' was specifically cited by the Minister in support of the clearing house option.

60 The work of the RDLOs will continue, at a similar level of funding (200,000 Australian dollars) but assigned to four universities spread across the regions (Central Queensland, Deakin, Western Sydney and Tasmania). The long-term future of the CPHESD initiative, however, looks less bright; some funding was allocated to co-operative projects started by universities in 1998, but specifically 'to bring them to a successful conclusion'. It should be noted that the total funding package for DIP represents only about 70 per cent of the annual funding committed to CPHESD between 1991 and 1997. A new element in the DIP programme is a grant of 25,000 Australian dollars for the University of Southern Queensland for a project focused on the use of communication technologies for students with disabilities who are studying externally (DETYA 1999b).

Conclusions

61 In all three countries, students with disabilities represent a growing constituency. This increase can be ascribed in part to the success of funding and other initiatives instituted by government and other agencies to improve access to HE, and in particular to better awareness by potential students of the services and programmes available. In particular, students with learning disabilities are gaining increased representation among HE students.

62 All three countries have thought it important to develop national programme standards or codes of practice in order to ensure an even standard of service provision for students with disabilities. A commonality of approach can be seen also in the establishment of national clearing houses for disability issues in HE in the USA and the UK, with Australia now explicitly choosing to adopt this successful model.

63 In terms of funding models, the USA and the UK have adopted a similar approach, with project-based grants awarded to institutions on a competitive tender basis. There is the expectation that the products of these winning projects will then be disseminated widely within the HE sector. In Australia, federal government funding has, hitherto, been distributed on a regional (rather than competitive) basis, but the co-operative project model, with funding allocated to a lead institution, has elements in common with the US LAAP programme, which emphasises 'creative partnerships' within and outside HE, and with the latest phase of HEFCE's SLDD initiative. Similarly, regional and national dissemination of project 'outcomes' is judged to have been one of the greatest strengths of Australia's co-operative projects. Under Australia's new DIP programme, funds are to be provided to projects 'on a submission basis'. Canada has not, as yet, adopted a project-focused funding model; support for students with disabilities takes the form of financial and other help directed either at institutions or individual students, with provincial governments seemingly taking quite disparate approaches to the level of support assigned to this student constituency.

64 Not surprisingly, a number of common themes arise both from the national guidelines and the funded initiatives within the different countries. These include:

- The need for written policies and guidelines and for the development of disability action plans with stated targets.
- The importance not merely of establishing policies and services for students with disabilities but making sure that information on these services is proactively disseminated, both by HEIs and funding agencies, to current and prospective students.
- The importance of considering the needs of students with disabilities at the planning stage, particularly with reference to large-scale capital projects or IT purchases.
- The US Demonstration Program projects put a strong emphasis on academic and administrative staff development; professional development is likewise an important feature of Australia's

CPHESD projects. The need for funding in this area is emphasised by Canada's NEADS study, which found that institutions judged their own performance in this area as relatively weak.

- The need for better provision for students with disabilities in the area of innovative distance learning is being tackled by LAAP-funded projects in the USA, by the University of Southern Queensland's new DIP project and by Canada's ADAPTECH project.
- The retention of students with disabilities and facilitating their transition to higher education is the focus of US projects funded by the FIPSE programme; in Australia, both the RDLO activities and, for example, Queensland's TIPD project put a similar emphasis on encouraging the transition from school to tertiary level education.

65 While the administration of co-operative projects has not been entirely problem-free and issues such as the duplication of effort by institutions in different regions has yet to be completely resolved, the evidence from Australia, Canada and the USA generally supports the effectiveness of targeted funding for students with disabilities. Access to HE has improved, and students with disabilities have a raised profile within HE and a better awareness of the services available to them (though there is still room for improvement here). In Canada, CADSPPE judged that specific funding initiatives had had 'a significant impact' on improving access, while the Australian CPHESD and RDLO initiatives were judged, respectively, by their evaluators to 'have added value' and 'to have proved a successful means of providing assistance' to students with disabilities and disability staff. From the viewpoint of HEFCE, in considering the future of the 'Improving Provision for Disabled Students' initiative, it is worth bearing in mind the comments made by Australian disability officers to the effect that, since disability initiatives are often concerned with changing deep-seated attitudes, short-term funded projects are unlikely to succeed in embedding lasting change.

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Appendix C: National Disability Team (NDT)

This Appendix provides a summary of the functions, activities, operating structure and management systems for the NDT. All information is drawn from the specification issued by the HEFCE inviting tenders to co-ordinate the 'Improving Provision For Disabled Students' initiative.

Functions and Activities

1. We would expect the functions and associated activities of the new co-ordination team to be:

a. To provide advice and support to the 50 funded projects to maximise the added value of the programme. The key activities associated with this function will be:

- i. To act as the first point of contact for all project enquiries related to the special funding programme, unless otherwise directed by HEFCE/DHFEET.
- ii. To visit all funded projects, a minimum of once each calendar year, to meet key project staff (including senior management), to provide consultancy advice to help projects meet their specified aims and objectives, to assist in the solution of any problems, and to review the progress made by each project against its specified aims and objectives. Whilst the co-ordination team will be required to review on a regular basis the progress of each project, the HEFCE will maintain responsibility for the formal monitoring of projects on an annual basis.
- iii. To organise and run specific events for projects to provide advice on generic issues such as project management, dissemination, monitoring, evaluation, collaboration and embedding.
- iv. To provide further support to projects through a variety of media including phone, e-mail and web-based provision of information.
- v. To encourage and facilitate collaboration and dissemination both between funded projects, and between projects and the sector and other bodies, as is appropriate.

b. To provide advice and support to those projects funded under the 1996-97 to 1998-99 funding programme for which HEFCE funding has yet to end. We would expect funding for all projects under this programme to end before December 2000. The key activities associated with this function will be those outlined in paragraph 1.a. above although we would not ordinarily expect these projects to be visited by the new co-ordination team.

c. To liaise with the Council's team of officers working on disability issues, and the Council's Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Advisory Group which has primary responsibility for advising the Council on disability funding policy and associated issues. The key activities associated with this function will be:

- i. To provide disability-related information, as requested, to both the Council and the Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Advisory Group.
- ii. To assist the HEFCE and DHFEET in communicating with the sector on disability-related policies.
- iii. To attend regular meetings of the co-ordination team's management group (see below), and one member of the co-ordination team to attend meetings of the Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Advisory Group. The team will be required to contribute to discussions as well as provide detail of its work, including annual operating plans, annual budgets, informal reports on progress against agreed aims and objectives, and a formal annual report on its activities.
- iv. To provide information, support and advice to the Council on disability issues, including the development and implementation of policy, as requested.

d. To provide advice and support to all HEFCE and DHFEET funded institutions on the development of disability provision as appropriate. We recognise that, given the activities outlined above, the co-ordination team will be able to provide only limited support to

institutions not funded through the 1999-2000 to 2001-02 special funding programme.

- e. To develop working relationships with the HEFCE's other co-ordination teams, including the National Co-ordination Team (NCT) for learning and teaching (currently based at the Open University), and the widening participation co-ordination team (which is about to be established). These relationships should both allow the teams to share common experiences, and ensure that all activities co-ordinated by the teams give appropriate attention to disability issues.
- f. To undertake other disability-related activity as may be required by the HEFCE/DHFETE.
2. Tenderers should note that we view the activities listed in paragraphs 1.a.i-iii and 1.b. as the team's priority activities and would expect a significant amount of the team's resources to be allocated to such activities.

Structure, Size, Location and Staffing of the Team

3. We would normally expect the successful team to demonstrate the following operational characteristics:
 - a. The team should have a full-time lead co-ordinator who will manage the team, including administrative staff, and provide the main link to the HEFCE and DHFETE on all operational matters.
 - b. In light of the available budget, we believe an appropriate mix of staff would be a minimum of two FTE co-ordinators (including the full-time lead co-ordinator) supported by a maximum of two FTE administrative staff (one of whom is likely to be a senior administrator).
 - c. We would like the team to have a strong central focus to both ensure the efficient management of resources, and to provide projects and the sector more widely with a clear and public focus of activity. We would expect to see all administrative staff centrally located. If possible we would also like all co-ordinators to be located in a single location. However, we

recognise that it may be necessary, in order to bring together a team of co-ordination staff with the appropriate mix of skills and experience, for co-ordinators to be drawn from a number of locations. Should a co-ordinator, or co-ordinators, be located away from the lead site we would still expect the core administrative functions of the team to take place centrally, although tenderers may wish to present a case for a very limited amount of local clerical support.

Planning, Budgets and Management Arrangements

4. The co-ordination team will report on a regular basis to a management group composed of HEFCE officers, members of the SLDD Advisory Group and appropriate external experts. The management group will provide regular advice and support to the team, to steer activities.
5. The team will be required to produce a strategy document setting out its approach over the period of the contract. Each operational year (May to April) the team will then be required to produce, in discussion with the management group, a detailed operating plan, including key performance targets, and a related budget. These will be discussed and agreed with the management group, before being formally considered by the Council's SLDD Advisory Group.

Glossary

AHEAD	Association on Higher Education and Disability (USA)
AMOSSHE	Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education
APSEA	Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (Canada)
AVCC	Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee
CADSPPE	Canadian Association of Disability Service Providers in Postsecondary Education
CHEMS	Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service
CPHESD	Cooperative Projects for Higher Education Students with Disabilities (Australia)
CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
DENI	Department of Education in Northern Ireland
DETYA	Department of Education, Training, and Youth Affairs (Australia)
DHFETE	Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (formerly DENI)
DISinHE	Disability Information Systems in Higher Education Centre
DSA	Disabled Students Allowance
EAPD	Employment Assistance for Persons with Disabilities (Canada)
EQUALL	Equal Opportunities, Access and Lifelong Learning Committee
EU	European Union
FDTL	Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning
FE	Further Education
FIPSE	Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education (USA)
JISC	Joint Information and Systems Committee
HEATH	National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities (USA)
HE	Higher Education
HEEP	Higher Education Equity Programme (Australia)
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
ILT	Institute for Learning and Teaching
LAAP	Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships (USA)
LTSN	Learning and Teaching Support Network
NADO	National Association of Disability Officers
NCT	National Co-ordination Team
NDT	National Disability Team

NEADS	National Educational Association of Disabled Students (Canada)
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RDLO	Regional Disability Liaison Officer Initiative (Australia)
RNIB	Royal National Institute for the Blind
RNID	Royal National Institute for Deaf People
SCOP	Standing Committee of College Principals
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
Skill	National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
SLDD	Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
TIPD	Tertiary Initiatives for People with a Disability (Australia)
TLTP	Teaching and Learning Technology Programme

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